

VISVA-BHARATI'S ADMINISTRATION

Rabindranath needed not one Secretary but more and Rathindranath, the first Upacharya, was assisted by a substantial bureaucracy. Can Santiniketan today be free of it?

The Basic Facts :

Visva-Bharati was founded on 22 December, 1921 (7th Pous, 1328 Bengali Calendar) and self described its name in the words – “The name of the society is Visva-Bharati”. (The name ‘Visva-Bharati’ was, of course, coined by Tagore, drawing it and the motto from *Yatra visvam bhavatyeka nidam* – Where the world makes its home in a single nest’). It was registered under Act XXI of 1860. A Memorandum of Association, Statutes & Regulations were framed accordingly. The Visva-Bharati Act of 1951 declared the institution known as Visva-Bharati “to be an institution of national importance and to provide for its functioning as unitary, teaching and residential university”.

The Act was amended in 1960, 1971 and in 1984.

The Samsad (Court) was made quite supreme by the provisions of the 1960 amendment but the 1971 amendment proceeded to reduce the powers of the Samsad (Court) with the following changes :

- i) Membership of the Education Minister of West Bengal was withdrawn;
- ii) Nomination of two members of the Samsad by the Acharya was omitted;
- iii) Nomination of two Professors of the University and two teachers other than Professors by the Paridarśaka were withdrawn.
- iv) The Samsad became largely advisory and its powers to review the acts of the Executive Council and Academic Council were withdrawn.
- v) The Executive Council was brought fully within the control of the Paridarśaka, with powers to amend, repeal or add to the Statutes being vested in the EC.
- vi) The EC was also given the authority to frame ordinances.

The Visva-Bharati Act, 1984, based mainly on the guidelines recommended by the Justice Masud Committee whose report was published by the Ministry of the Education in 1975, had the Executive Council given new powers. The rational representation from various Sectors in the various Authorities of the University and the nominations / representations of the Paridarśaka/Acharya/Pradhana that were absent in various amendments from 1951 to 1971 were incorporated in Visva-Bharati Amendment Act 1984 under various Statutes e.g. Statute 10, 13,15,17,20(G),20(H). The position of Artha Sachiva (Treasurer) was modified as Vitta Adhikari (Finance Officer) under Statute 6 in Visva-Bharati Amendment Act 1984 and brought on par with the position of Registrar. The Student Council, under Statute 20(i) and the incorporation of ‘maintenance of discipline’ among students was a major incorporation in the 1984 Amendment.

The changes that the Visva-Bharati Amendment Act, 1984, made in the matters of Samsad (Court), Executive Council, standing Finance Committee, Academic Council, the mode of appointment, the term, powers and functioning of Acharya and Upacharya, as also matters relating to the Paridarśaka and his role were significant. The powers of the University under Act 6 were re-defined elaborately in Visva-Bharati Amendment Act, 1984 and the number of VB’s institutions were increased from 7 in 1960 to 11 and described under Statute 19 in terms of the Visva-Bharati Amendment Act, 1984. The incorporation of an Advisory Council for Educational Innovations under Statute 20H, Right of Appeal/Review under Statute 20P and Right of Appeal in

Certain Other Cases under Statute 20Q are also the result of the Visva-Bharati Amendment Act, 1984. The incorporations of three Directors under Statute 4A, 4B and 4C under the Visva-Bharati Amendment Act, 1984 are also to be noted. The Adhyaksha (Principal) of Patha Bhavana was brought into the EC by the Visva-Bharati Amendment Act, 1984.

The Act as it now stands, with amendments made to it in 1960, 1971 and 1984, describes the officers of the University as follows :

- 1) The Acharya (Chancellor)
- 2) The Upacharya (Vice-Chancellor)
- 3) The Director of Studies, Educational Innovations and Rural Reconstruction
- 4) The Director of Culture and Cultural Relations
- 5) The Director of Physical Education, Sports, National Service and Student Welfare
- 6) The Karma-Sachiva (Registrar)
- 7) The Vitta-Adhikari (Finance Officer)
- 8) Adhyakshas of Bhavanas and
- 9) Such other officers as may be declared by the Statutes to be officers of the University

Observations and Recommendations :

1. The EC is, at present, the supreme body of the VB, with the Upacharya at its head;
2. The accountability of EC/VC to the Paridarśaka makes VB intimately bound-up with the Paridarśaka who is advised by the Ministry of HRD, UGC and of course, by the Acharya.
3. The Act does not provide for a position of Saha- Upacharya.
4. The HLC recommendation in this regard is : “Visva-Bharati has functioned without a Saha-Upacharya since its inception. It is now embarking on ambitious programmes of radical reorganization, including the introduction of new integrated programmes of studies and research. In order to make the new programmes effective, which will include as a central component, integrated courses of study and research in the sciences and social sciences, the Upacharya will require support at the highest level to carry his responsibilities forward. A Saha- Upacharya needs to be associated with him in his academic and administrative functions and will substitute for him in his absence. He will have to be a person of sufficient professional standing to discharge his responsibilities effectively and relieve the Upacharya from some of the pressures that will arise when the University embarks on its new programmes of study and research.”

This recommendation will require an Amendment of the Act in Parliament. It took about a decade for the Masud Committee recommendations to become a Bill and an Act; we trust our simple proposals for Amendments to the Act will take no more than one inter-session recess of Parliament to formulate. The amendment should provide for Pro-VC being selected by the EC on the recommendation of the Upacharya. The person need not be from within the VB system, but should be a person with a distinguished academic record combined, if possible, with experience in the running of academic/research organizations.

5. In parallel, the HLC recommends that the Statutory Post of Director of Physical Education be done away with not just because VB has not filled that position for a number of

decades, but also because the requirements of physical education can be met without such a statutory post.

6. A new post of a Director for Sriniketan needs to be created to consolidate and coordinate all the activities of Sriniketan including the work of the Palli Siksha Bhavana and the Rural Extension Centre. For this the existing office of Director of Studies, Educational Innovations and Rural Reconstruction would need to be re-designated as 'Director of Education, Research and Rural Extension Activities, Sriniketan'. This would also require an amendment of the description of that Directorship in the Act and Statutes. The selection for this position should also follow the procedure proposed for the Pro-VC.

7. The existing provisions in the VB Statutes on the Karma Samiti are well thought out, fair and rational and give representation to different sections that *should* be represented. Nevertheless to strengthen its *Ashramik* content following modifications required to be considered by way of adding to item '13. The Karma-Samiti (Executive Council)', the following new members :

- (xiv) One alumnus nominated by the Upacharya
- (xv) One ex-Adhyapaka nominated by the Upacharya

If the same number on the Karma-Samiti is to be maintained, then the following alterations will be necessary:

13 (x) Two [not three] persons to be elected by the Samsad from among its members none of whom shall be an employee or a student of the University

The next sentence, viz., 'provided that one of the members so elected shall be a member of the Alumni Association', will have to be omitted

13 (ix) Two [not three] Adhyapakas of the University by rotation according to seniority

A new clause needs to be added:

13 (xiv) A Professor of not less than five years' service at Visva-Bharati nominated by Upacharya.

If the same number on the Karma-Samiti need not be retained, there can be a net additionality of two, viz., one alumnus and one ex-Adhyapaka to be nominated by the Upacharya.

For enabling the Pro-VC to serve on the Karma-Samiti, the following addition will be necessary:

13 (ii) The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Saha-Upacharya), omitting (to keep the same number on Karma Samiti) the following existing clause :

13 (iv) The Director of Physical Education, Sports, National Service and Student Welfare.

An appropriate renumbered and re-drafted composition of the Samsad and Karma-Samiti will have to be undertaken by VB for the consideration of the competent authorities for suggesting amendments to the Act and Statutes.

8. Bearing in mind Tagore's incisive comment on the lack of 'companionship' in Visva-Bharati, and to reduce the gulf between the Upacharya and the faculty, the HLC recommends the formation of an inter-departmental council comprising the following :

- i) The Upacharya
- ii) The Saha-Upacharya
- iii) The Director of Rabindra Bhavana/Tagore Memorial Institute
- iv) The Director of Sriniketan
- v) The Adhyakshas of the Institutes
- vi) The Heads of the Departments
- vii) The Granthagarika (Librarian)
- viii) The Chhatra Parichalaka (Proctor)

The Registrar shall be present to take notes or appoint a representative.

The practical working of the proposed Council will be (a) to promote day to day collectivity between the departments, (b) to promote exchanges between the higher university administrators and the academic staff and (c) to deal with campus situations on the basis of collective wisdom.

The Inter-Departmental Council may be established by means of a Statute.

The Council will also serve to assist the Heads of Departments :

- i) to run the new integrated courses of the University on a genuinely inter-disciplinary basis;
- ii) to promote inter-departmental exchanges and to run the inter-disciplinary lectures and seminars of the University as a whole, and also to promote extra-curricular and cultural functions on a collective basis;
- iii) to help the Upacharya and the University authorities to run the administration through its collective advice;
- iv) to ensure the smooth running of the University and to pool and share relevant information;
- v) to generate thinking on policy decisions on an informal and collective basis so that the Upacharya can refer matters to the Karma Samiti and the Siksha Samiti with assured inputs.

The meetings of the Council may be convened by the Upacharya at short notice, waiving requirements of quorum. Departmental heads who are unable to attend could send representatives on their behalf. It is not proposed that this Council be an 'authority' of the University requiring adumbration in the Act or Statutes.

9. To increase the involvement of students in the life of the campus as a whole, it is suggested that each Department should ask the students to design and run an academic seminar wholly and exclusively by their own initiative with a Seminar Secretary appointed consensually by the students for each year, i.e., there should be five Seminar Secretaries covering graduate and post-graduate students. These Seminars should be inter-disciplinary. The Head, Adyaksha and the Upacharya will have the power to modify or cancel any proposal deemed contrary to the interest of VB but otherwise the Students' Seminar Secretaries and the Inter-Seminar Secretaries will be fully autonomous and will run their own programme in consultation with the authorities.

10. Visva-Bharati has had a Proctor. This position/office needs to be activated by being clothed with requisite authority and powers, by means of a statute amendment. The HLC would recommend that a senior Professor of the University be appointed Proctor by the Upacharya, from among those Professors who are already in the Karma-Samiti.

11. A UGC directive, based on the Expenditure Reforms Commission's recommendations accepted by the Government of India, is in force requiring that the ratio of non-teaching staff to teaching staff should stand at 1.5:1 or at any rate not more than 2:1. The sanctioned strength of the non-teaching staff is about 1600 and the sanctioned strength of the teaching staff is about 650. It is therefore recommended that the ratio of the non-teaching staff to the teaching staff be brought down in stages to 2:1, and then to 1.5:1. At the moment the actual number of non-teaching staff is about 1450. The HLC recommends that this should be brought down in stages to 1300 (ratio 2:1) and then to 1000 (ratio 1.5:1).

Rabindra Bhavana and the engineering department may be excepted from this count.

12. A UGC order requiring that casual workers should not be employed has not so far been implemented. Visva-Bharati should try and carry this out, initially converting payments from monthly wage to daily wage for casual workers.

Most importantly, Visva-Bharati is bound to comply with the UGC directive to outsource work, especially in the case of security, transport and sanitation workers. This process has begun with security and transport personnel, and it should now extend to sanitation personnel, too, with due regard to the terms and conditions governing existing permanent personnel.

13. As regards the setting up of the Visva-Bharati Conservation and Preservation Society (mentioned on pages 39-40), the HLC would recommend that the formation and role of this Society be incorporated in the Act to give it a statutory under-pinning and to ensure that its work is given the seriousness it calls for.

14. The HLC recommends that

(i) The Upacharya sets up a 3-member Committee headed by the Registrar to draw up a list of amendments that will be needed to bring the Act and Statutes in line with the relevant recommendations and submit it to the Ministry for Human Resources Development within a month of the submission of this Report to the Paridarśaka; and

(ii) An Overseeing Committee be appointed for a period of at least two years from the date of the Government of India's official response to the recommendations of the HLC, for the purpose of overseeing the implementation of the recommendations and assisting the Upacharya and the Santiniketan-based officers of the University in the process. This Committee could meet at regular intervals and at short notice.

The HLC would recommend that this Committee, which should comprise five members would have a 'watching', 'reporting', and 'advisory' brief without any executive powers of its own. The Overseeing Committee could comprise the following :

(i) A Convener to be selected by the Acharya.

(ii) An expert having knowledge in activities of Rural Regeneration and Rural Reconstruction from outside the VB selected by the Acharya,

- (iii) An expert in the Integrated Science concept, selected by the Acharya
- (iv) A representative from the Karma Samiti (EC) selected by the Upacharya,
- (v) A representative from the Samsad/Siksha Samiti (AC) selected by the Upacharya.

15. The deliberations of the Committee should be made available to the Upacharya under intimation, wherever he/she feels it necessary, by the Upacharya to the Pradhana, the Acharya and the Paridarśaka.