

Best Practices 2022-2023

Best Practice I

Title: An Institution that Redefines Modernity

“It is not that secular and spiritual are two opposite and contradictory things; but they are the same thing, the same infinite knowledge...”

Swami Vivekananda

Objectives of the Practice: Following the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda, who spoke of the synthesis or blending of *Para* and *Apara Vidya* into the same infinite knowledge, the College envisions Education as a true synthesis of spiritual and material knowledge, and, in extension, of Tradition and Modernity. Accordingly, the atmosphere and activities of the institution are designed to strike a perfect balance between past traditions and contemporary concepts and practices. The objective is to create the modern Indian woman by redefining modernity as a concept that assimilates tradition, or is itself distilled out of tradition.

The Context: Alarmed by the mindless cloning of the West, indicative of a rapidly eroding cultural legacy of the Indian youth, the Institution seeks to challenge the concept of Modernity as something that excludes all that is traditional and age old. Rather, it looks at Modernity as an assimilation of pragmatism, intellect, spirituality, and open mindedness, and aims at molding its students along these ideals.

The Practice: A comprehensive look at the curricular and co-curricular activities of a student from the day she joins RKSMVV till she graduates, will point at the synthesis of the traditional and the contemporary, or of the spiritual and the secular. Her day begins with the Morning Assembly and Prayers – be it *Saraswati Vandana*, or an appeal to the Almighty to lead her from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge, to give her strength and power to find the correct path, to teach her to respect her elders, teachers and Gurus, or a Shloka worshipping Mother Nature, ending with the most powerful words, “Shanti, Shanti, Shanti”. This daily ritual puts her mind at rest, helping her to concentrate and stay focused for the rest of the day. Her classes expose her to the vast and complex spectrum of the curriculum, with a wide range of cross cutting social, ethical and environmental issues. She is taught to analyze critique and question. She might have a lecture on Artificial Intelligence or Legal Rights of Transgenders scheduled for the afternoon.

Similarly, the weekly Value Education classes that talk about Indian tradition and culture, morality, spirituality, and ethics, or introduce her to the vast treasure of the Ramakrishna-Vedanta philosophy, may be followed or preceded by training sessions on self-defence against physical assaults, or an intense workshop on child sexual abuse.

Again, while ‘Freshers’ in other institutions are ‘welcomed’ to the blaring music and psychedelic lights of rock concerts, here students become part of the institution through the *Vidyarthini Homa*, a solemn oath-taking ceremony before the holy fire. This does not, however, deter the students- freshers and seniors – to spend a fun filled afternoon of music, dance and skits, getting

to know each other in the *Nobin Boron* programme. The same tradition-modern synthesis can be noticed in the choice of plays performed by students every year during the Annual Function of the College. The range is wide – from Tagore to Shakespeare, from Chekhov to Shombhu Mitra, and from the Arabian Nights to the Mahabharata. A common feature, thoroughly enjoyed by the performers and audience alike, is dramatic representation of some episode from the life of Swami Vivekananda, something unique to the institution.

The same synthesis is noticed in the range of value added certificate courses offered: Women Empowerment and Sri Sarada Devi, Religious Harmony and Sri Ramakrishna, Youth Icon Swami Vivekananda, GIS and Remote Sensing, Web Designing and Photoshop, Digital, Marketing, Digital Content Writing, Research Methodology, Print Advertisement, Library Science, Basic Mathematics, Environmental Ethics, Organic Farming, Srimadbhagavadgita - are among the eclectic mix of courses carefully curated in keeping with the philosophy of balancing the spiritual and material.

The year round events – seminars, workshops, conferences, lectures – reflect the same thrust. Between 2018 and 2023, national and international conferences were held on topics as diverse as Yoga, Medical Ethics, Women Empowerment, Partition Literature, Childhood Spaces, Disaster Management, E-learning, Digital Resource Sharing, Use of ICT, Intellectual Property Rights and Cyber Crime. The focus was on critically approaching issues from practical, intellectual, academic, as well as moral and ethical angles. The student audience responded with the same rapt attentiveness when Anindya Chattopadhyay, leading band musician and filmmaker held a workshop on creating songs from scratch, or when Swami Chetanananda lectured on the Ramakrishna Vivekananda Movement and Human Values. Lectures on the LGBT Pride Movement attracted the same amount of queries as did talks on Sister Nivedita's invaluable legacy.

Students of RKSMVV, who participate in the outreach activities the year round, are as enthusiastic when they explain menstrual hygiene to adolescent girls and their mothers from the neighbourhood slums, or the effects of plastic bags to local shop owners, as when they participate in the Youth Day processions or Safe Drive rallies. They bring accolades from Yoga competitions as from Hackathons and college fests. The College has been able to successfully ingrain in students a modern mindset tempered with a sense of pride in their roots and cultural heritage.

Evidence of Success:

The best evidence of this amalgamation is the great success of the annual Youth Conventions, where motivational speeches and sessions on the philosophical and spiritual heritage of the land are attended by a large number of past students, many of whom currently hold responsible positions in public and corporate sectors, schools and colleges or run independent businesses. The spontaneity and generosity with which the alumni - efficient mothers and homemakers as well as highly successful professionals - respond to the needs of society as well as that of their alma mater, in their involvement in the welfare of the institution, their eagerness in extending support to their younger sisters, can one see the true success of the Institution's efforts of blending practical training and moral values.

To RKSMVV students, Modernity is not divorced from Tradition. Instead, they are initiated into a new definition of Modernity which stems from culture and tradition, which is pragmatic, practical, and progressive.

Problems Encountered and Resources Required: None so far.

Best Practice II

Title: Creating, Conserving, and Mapping Campus Greenery

Objective of the Practice:

- Maintenance and sustainable enhancement of campus greenery, with focus on a balanced ecosystem within and outside the campus.
- Generation of awareness and responsibility among students and staff about environment, ecology and sustainable development.

The Context:

The college was founded in 1961 on a vast piece of land donated by a well wisher in the eastern fringes of Kolkata. The locality was, and still is, an uneven mix of well planned middle class homes, factories, and unplanned slums. Recent years have seen the advent of highrises, leading to a significant decrease in greenery, increase in population, domestic waste, vehicle emission, and, consequently, in carbon emission. The Bagjola Canal flows by the west of the campus, carrying with it huge amount of untreated factory and domestic waste, animal carcasses, plastics and Styrofoam wastes. Overflowing of the canal during monsoons is practically an annual affair, resulting in silted filth and squalor on surrounding areas, including the college grounds. The well maintained lush green RKSMVV campus is like a virtual oasis amidst the eroding greenery and increasing filth. The institution makes a serious and sustained effort to maintain and upgrade the greenery, not only for its occupants, but for the entire neighbourhood.

The Practice: To augment the established green practices, few new and innovative initiatives have been added to the green endeavours of RKSMVV - the Urban Forest, Medicinal Plant Garden, and a collaborative project on Flora-Fauna Mapping are among them.

1. *Jeevaka Kanan* - The Medicinal Herbarium.

A special patch allotted solely for medicinal plants and herbs has been put under the supervision and care of the NSS wing and Garden Committee of the college, aiming for greater student involvement in growing and maintaining medicinal plants. It has been developed with assistance from the West Bengal Biodiversity Board, and the Department of . Medicinal Plants, Ramakrishna Mission Residential College, Narendrapur. At present there are 39 species of medicinal herbs in the patch, nourished and nurtured by the team.

2. *Jeevaka Kanan Prakalpa*: The IKS Cell has initiated a collaborative research project on available herbs and plants at Jeevaka Kanan, aimed at creating awareness among students and faculties about medicinal plants and their uses as described in the Ancient Medical Science of

Ayurveda. The core objective is to popularize the use of commonly available medicinal plants and to conserve the associated traditional knowledge in sustainable manner.

https://rksmvv.ac.in/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/PROJECT_JIVAKA_KANAN_RKSMVV_ENGLISH.pdf

3. *Naimisharanya*, the RKSMVV Urban Forest.

Urban Forestry is defined as the care and management of single trees and tree populations in urban settings for the purpose of improving the urban environment. It involves the cultivation, management and preservation of natural resources as well as trees and green spaces within developed areas, like, cities, towns and urban areas.

On 28.07.2023 1000 saplings of 42 different flora species were planted in a 1200 sqr feet section of the campus greens identified and prepared in advance. Three types of trees - tall-tree (11 species), sub tree (16 species) and small tree or Shrub (15 species) were closely planted for maintaining three different tiers of this forest. And, thus, '*Naimisharanya*', the Urban Forestry project of RKSMVV, was born in collaboration with the West Bengal Biodiversity Board, guided by Dr. Anirban Roy, Research Officer, WBBB. Expected growth of trees has been observed, signifying initial success.

This effort of creating and maintaining an Urban Forest within the college premises aims at a profound ecological imprint in this congested urban area, monitor the air quality of the surrounding area, as well as increase the bio-capacity for the sustainability of the environment for future generations.

This initiative aims to achieve several important objectives:

Environmental Sustainability: The Urban Forest project is designed to sustain and enhance the local environment, fostering biodiversity and contributing to cleaner air and a healthier ecosystem.

Educational Endeavour: Students will actively engage in learning about various tree species as they participate in planting and nurturing the forest. This hands-on experience will deepen their understanding of ecology and conservation.

Community Engagement: Local school children will be invited to participate in educational programs aimed at enriching their knowledge of plants, fostering a sense of environmental awareness from a young age.

Research Initiative: The Economics, Sociology, and Geography Departments are planning a collaborative research project on the socio-economic and geographical implications of the Urban Forest.

4. **Campus Flora-Fauna Mapping:** The RKSMVV Campus nourishes more than 700 trees of different species. The West Bengal Biodiversity Board was requested to guide the student-teacher research team in identifying and mapping the trees with separate identification tags. Dr. Anirban Roy, Research Officer of the West Bengal Biodiversity Board, visited the college on 09.03.2023. On inspection, more than 65 different flora species were identified. The research team followed up the introductory survey in the following manner:

- Vernacular names of the species along with their scientific names and families were noted down.
- The number of trees of each species were marked in white with letters as 'A', 'B', 'C', 'D' etc. It took seven days to complete the work.
- The height of the trees, their canopy area and diameter were measured and recorded.

- The location of each tree was determined by their latitude and longitude with the help of GPS Map Camera. Moreover, each tree was given a name-plate in Bengali, including their scientific names and medicinal uses.
- The entire work was performed under supervision and guidance of Dr. Anirban Roy, Research Officer, WBBB.

Evidence of Success:

Significant increase in interest in, and awareness about, campus flora and fauna among students and teachers.

Significant increase in campus greenery, decrease in soil erosion.

Visible increase in the number of birds, butterflies and bees, as well as mongoose and squirrels in the campus.

Problems Encountered and Resources Required: Lack of sustained funding for maintenance.