

7.3.1: Portray the performance of the Institution in one area distinctive to its priority and thrust within 1000 words

Title of the Distinctiveness:

Transforming the Higher Education Demography of Rural Bengal by Offering the Highest Level of Education at Lowest Financial Involvement: Empowering Rural Bengal in the Light of Education and Manifesting the Power of Self-reliance to Take Up Social Challenges

As envisioned by the founder of the Institution and as stated in part of the Vision statement of the Institute; the major focus and thrust area of the institute has been to inculcate a sustainable ecosystem of higher education by fostering a state-of-the-art technology-enabled pedagogical approach within the financial reach of rural India. The Institute is pinned by three rivers of south Bengal and the surrounding area remained in isolation over the years; the angel touch of education has enlightened first-generation learners of this village. The main occupation of the people in the village has been cultivation and very little industrial development has occurred. This has resulted in poor socioeconomic development and limited financial resources to take up higher studies. This data is certainly against the recommendation of NEP 2020, to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education from 26.13% (2018) to 50% (2030). [source:<https://taazakhabarnews.com/higher-education-in-india-road-ahead/>]. Several surveys reported that students could join and remain in an educational institution due to three major aspects namely cost factor/fees, quality of the institution, and placement record. Six Indian states namely Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Karnataka account for more than 54% of the total students' enrolment in higher education. An immediate remedy to this problem is to make higher education more affordable, ensuring that the quality of teaching is not compromised. Our Institute focuses on this important factor and provides basic undergraduate education at the lowest cost. Here a student can learn undergraduate studies in 4 years Honours and Honours with Research programme with an annual fee of Rs. 2300/- for BA & Rs. 2320.00 for Commerce programme and Rs. 2470.00 for Science programme. In case of 3 years MDC programme annual fee is less than Rs. 2250.00 for BA, Rs. 2270.00 B.Com and Rs. 2420 B.SC.(G & BIO.). There has been less than 5% deviation in these annual fees over the past 5 years ensuring the policy of making education available to the larger-section of potential students. In addition, several scholarships are provided to needy-students and full-tuition-fee waivers to the students of villages-adopted by the Institution. The total course fee for a student acquiring an undergraduate BA (4-years) programme is now approximately Rs. 12000/-which is even smaller than the 3-years programme of nearby colleges (Bagnan College: Rs. 15520/- only 20-kms away)

To develop an educational eco-system, in adopted villages, students are addressed by a team of teachers from a very early stage of school-life, who are trained in the academic-skills of science, mathematics, languages and performing arts like art, music and dance. Such students make regular visits to college science-labs and are given special invitations in events like college-sports events, cultural-events and exhibitions.

As per the record, 66.6% of the students in the college over the past five years have been girls' students which may be grossly impacted by Govt. schemes like 'Kanyashree-I, II'. However in the rural background, there are challenges of 'early marriage, early-motherhood resulting in dropping out'; resulting in a significant drop in the number of students admitted to the number graduating-out of the Institute. In this perspective, financial empowerment schemes of the Institute like 'earn while you learn' have given confidence to the students to fight against this challenge; enabling more students to transform their lives towards the spirit of higher education and a professional career of his/her choice.

The darker side of the GER at our College, in the past few years, is the drop in the enrolment rate of male students due to several reasons including their personal family reasons where the reduction in tuition fee is not enough for them to continue with studies and such male students had to take up the path of unskilled labour; not allowing us to reach the desired goal of enlightening education to the larger stakeholder of the society. Hence, the Institute is providing additional job skills and internships to local small companies. At a highly subsidized rate students are provided with training on Basic Computer Skills is provided to every student by reputed organizations like 'WEBEL Technologies Ltd'. Students of commerce are sent to local farms to enhance skill requirements and higher empowerment. Thus, empowering students with higher skill sets for high-profile jobs.

Apart from this, the Institute is in the process of opening of Distance Learning Centre under two different Universities, Rabindra Bharati University and Netaji Subhash Open University where mainly Postgraduate Courses are offered, and students have the option of finding postgraduate pathways at their own college only. Prior to that the Institute acted as a Post Graduate Distance Learning Centre of Vidyasagar University. Minimizing their cost of travel, going to City Colleges or nearest universities such University of Calcutta (approximately 100 Kms away) and Vidyasagar University (approximately 90 Kms away). Thus, satisfying the Institutional objective of sharing the light of the highest education at the lowest expenses.

Thus, being situated in a rural backdrop Shyampur Siddheswari Mahavidyalaya provides a platform to the majority of the economically weaker section of the community. All these efforts have some positive impacts on students' performance. 90% of toppers in University exams from the college are female. Not only institutional students but also local women are given computer training, social sensitization by Women-Cell, and awareness drives against human-trafficking; keeping a signature on the larger-society even those who are not directly enrolled in the Institution. Girls'-students are trained with additional skill-oriented courses like 'Beautician', 'Embroidery' 'Craft-making', 'front-office-management', 'Sports' are some of them have developed their own business. The overall

impact of these initiatives has a profound effect on the mindset of the women of the locality (being 66% of enrolled students) uplifting their self-confidence, creativity, sense-of-independence and individuality, sense-of-equal-rights in all-stages. Eventually, this has reduced early-marriage, domestic-violence against women etc. in local-communities.