In November 2002, the Ramakrishna Mission Lokashiksha Parishad has introduced a new innovative programme for community Education. Twenty learning Centres in East Medinipur district were identified by the Parishad to promote this activity. This is the origin of Lokashiksha Kendra of Tamluk in East Medinipur. In this write-up a brief description along with limitations and possibilities of this innovative programme are presented.

Background

The word ‘Lokashiksha’ was used on different occasions by Sri Ramakrishna himself. He considered ‘Lokashiksha’ as the foremost duty of an enlightened person and explained this view to Iswarchandra Vidyasagar when they met in August 1882. The great teacher also highlighted the significance of lifelong learning 100 years before the Jomtien Conference (1990). He coined the expression of lifelong learning in such wonderful rhythmic vocabulary (Jabat Bachi Tabat Shikhi) that it became a popular proverb in common households of Bengal. His disciple Swami Akhandananda set up the first non-formal school for orphans in Murshidabad way back in July 1897. He noticed a four-year-old Santal girl eating uncooked rice in a famine-stricken village. Akhandananda brought her in his sevakendra and offered food and water. For another group of Santals, Sri Ramkrishna performed the same act of ‘seva’ when he was on a pilgrimage with Mathur Babu, in 1868. However, Akhandananda sought Swami Vivekananda’s permission for establishing an orphanage for such helpless children. The permission came quickly and Akhandananda established the first shelter for education and development of the orphans in Sargachi under the Ramakrishna Mission, towards the end of July 1897.

Sri Ramakrishna never used nor tolerated words like ‘pity’, ‘mercy’ or ‘charity’ (‘Daya’). He preached that the suffering humanity should be served as divine beings. Thus the act of serving the poor almost became as religious
practice among his followers. Swami Nirvedananda wrote ‘The service of humanity.’ (is). worshiping divinity’. Therefore, these initiatives were diversified in the later years and after the Bengal Famine of 1943, a Students Home for poor meritorious pupils was instituted by Swami Lokeswarananda, the founder of Lokashiksha Parishad, in Kolkata. In the following years Lokeswaranada organised relief works in the Sundarbans and gave shape to the programmes and polices of Ramakrishna Mission Lokasiksha Parishad. Thereafter manifold advancement and expansions of both formal and non-formal initiatives and social welfare programmes were guided by the Ramakrishna Mission Lokashiksha Parishad (RKMLSP) on an almost regular basis. Lokashiksha Kendra is the latest addition in the series of innovative programs organised by RKMLSP.

**Literacy and Community Education Programmes of RKMLSP**

Since the early sixties, the RKMLSP has been organising literacy and non-formal programmes with the utmost care. The Parishad has developed 15 different sets of primers for adult, non-formal and early childhood programmes and a total 82 books for post-literacy and income generation programmes. The Mission has also created excellent facilities of training in 12 districts of West Bengal and has developed a ‘Literacy Cell’. This cell, with a core group of experts, coordinated and conducted different programmes during the last four decades. They designed the curriculum, and infused modern ways of elementary learning in all programmes of the RKMLSP.

**Designing the programme as per learning needs**

Learning needs, as well as areas of empowerment were ascertained in all the above programmes on the basis of local requirements and social and economic settings. In rural Murshidabad for example, where occupation of 82% of people is agriculture, female literacy is 29.06%(1991), water-born diseases are the principal cause of high infant mortality (97 per 1000 birth), average age of marriage of female is 16 (1991), and total fertility rate is 5, the post literacy programme targeted women learners and health issues on a priority basis.
On the other hand, in South 24 parganas, where out-of-school children of the semi-urban slums came in large numbers, the income generating programmes and vocational trainings got preference in the innovative programme. In East and West Medinipur Districts where RKMLSP implemented the UNICEF-sponsored programme of sanitation and safe drinking water, the education curriculum was designed accordingly. From the period of NAEP (1978), the RKMLSP has evaluated the immediate outcomes and long-term effects of these non-formal and literacy programmes and have arrived at the following conclusions --

A. It is to be remembered that there will be a large number of successful NFE learners who will not be willing to return to formal system of education but prefer to remain in some sort of Non-formal/open system of education throughout their life. For them the society will have to develop an alternative system of non-formal/open system comparable to formal system from elementary to University education. The details of its programme, structure and learning materials will have to be evolved according to needs and capacity of its learners at different stages of education.

(Assessment of non-formal Education, RKMLSP, 1989, P – 69)

B. Our quest for more relevant form of popular education (will) lead to a self-sustaining learning society.

(Post literacy Programme, Final Evaluation (Internal) of Learning Outcome, Report, RKMLSP, Forward, 1998.)

C. The survey revealed a large number of children in the age group of 6-14 who have never enrolled themselves in any school in spite of existence of such facilities near their homes. It discloses 4 factors as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i. Lack of awareness towards needs for education</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Poor economic condition</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. Pressure of domestic work</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv. Socio-religious factors</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*As told by the children.

The respondents have revealed almost same factors for dropouts and non-enrolment.

(Innovative ideas in Elementary Education Project, in Sonarpur Block, South 24-Parganas, RKMLSP, Undated, Annexure-II, P-10)

The ‘Literacy Cell’ of the RKMLSP organized two Workshops in May and June 2001, for a comprehensive review of all community education programme. In those workshops the following observations were made.--
a. After the TLC intervention, Literacy, Post Literacy and NFE and all other non-formal programmes need a renewed delivery system and futuristic policy.

b. A community should be the target of the new programme, not a particular programme for particular segment like NFE or Ad E etc.

c. Multiple programmes of non-formal education stimulate the community’s eagerness for learning and each one of these programmes removes the imperfection of the other one.

d. Using local Youth clubs and promoting them as the ‘delivery-point NGO’ was an effective and replicable idea for all rural development programmes. Future of the community education programmes, more or less, depends on strengthening of these local NGOs.

e. Swami Lokeshwaranandaji’s idea of running development activities without external assistance should be an integrated part of all community education programmes. This idea should be translated into reality in each programme in a phased manner. Otherwise all extension works would be short-lived and dominated by external forces. In that case creative minds will disappear from the NGO’s and civil society movements will suffer in future.

f. A programme for old age people (50+) should be included in the community education programmes.

The above reports and views insisted that the RKMLSP plan and execute a new learning Centre named Lokashiksha kendra. Meanwhile, the Dakar declaration has infused a fresh initiative among community educators worldwide. In 2002, Government of India also introduced the programme of ‘Sarva Shiksha Abijan’. Some new steps are being taken in the area of
elementary education all over India. At this juncture, the RKMLSP has developed this programme of LSP as its own programme of *Education for All*.

**Delivery System**——

Most of the time RKMLSP does not work directly in the villages. It depends on a network of local NGOs. The following three-tier delivery system has been developed to plan, coordinate and execute different activities of the RKMLSP. It may be noted that these local organizations are independent, self-sustaining and democratic bodies of freethinking persons. They came to participate in these programmes due to their inclinations towards people’s development and regard to Vivekananda’s way of thinking.

![Diagram of delivery system]

All these organizations are registered under the Societies Registration Act. The cluster committee provides support and guidance and monitors the programmes. They also maintain co-ordination and linkages with the RKMLSP and other local and National/International organizations. In such a structure the organization having the farthest reach is the village level club. These clubs generate a two dimensional positive effect in remote villages. They motivate the village youth for participating in social service and create noble intentions and hopes in the minds of the surrounding community. The size of this network of village organizations is given here in below—
Location and number of field-level Organisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Blocks Covered</th>
<th>Cluster Organizations</th>
<th>Gram Unnayan Kendras</th>
<th>Directly associated Youth Organizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South 24 Parganas</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North 24 Parganas</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purba Medinipur</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paschim Medinipur</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murshidabad</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bardhaman</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purulia</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bnkura</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birbhum</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howrah</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hooghly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>74</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td><strong>267</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As on December, 2002

*Lokashiksha Kendra*

‘*Lokashiksha Kendra*’ is an institution for non-formal learning, which takes care of all learning needs of the disadvantage community in a coherent method. This *Kendra* excludes the territory directly covered by formal education from its activity but includes the ‘dropout’ prone groups., particularly the first generation learners of primary school, in its programme.

The Ramakrishna Mission has been organizing twenty Community Learning Centres (CLC) for the past three years. This is a programme supported by UNESCO within the framework of APPEAL (Asia Pacific Program of Education for All). UNESCO perceived CLC as ‘A local educational institution outside the formal education system for villages or urban areas usually set up and managed by local people to provide various learning opportunities for community development and improvement of people’s quality of life’. CLC promotes the following five programmes under the umbrella of a locally managed Institution-

a. Basic Literacy.
b. Post Literacy and Continuing education.
c. Skill development.
d. Social mobilization.
e. Cultural development.
In the ‘Lokashiksha Kendra’ the central idea of the CLC programme has been redesigned and widened to meet the local needs and to harmonize it with other activities of RKMLSP. Practically ‘Lokashiksha Kendra’ is as an expanded version of CLCs where some problems of formal education are also addressed and a unique delivery system is incorporated. The newness of this initiative may be identified from the outline of programmes presented after the base line survey.

**Base Line Survey --**

The RKMLSP has been running Early childhood programme since 1988 in and around Tamluk of East Medinipur District. ‘Tamralipta Guccha Samity’, the local cluster-level federation of Youth clubs started its function from 1980. It has been promoting the programmes of early childhood education, sanitation, safe drinking water, non-formal education and youth training from time to time in the Blocks of Nandakumar, Tamluk, Panskura-II, Saheed Matangini and Mahisadal. The RKMLSP decided to start all activities of ‘Lokashiksha Kendra’ in twenty clubs of this area. Accordingly a base line survey had been conducted in September 2002 in an around twenty rural clubs. Approximately one hundred poor families were identified in the catchment area of each club and survey on those families revealed the following educational status.

**Educational Status of the Adults (15+ age)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>31.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-literate</td>
<td>32.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literate</td>
<td>36.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Educational Status of Minors (6-15 years)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School going children</td>
<td>77.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropouts</td>
<td>17.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never attended school</td>
<td>5.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total population of the Project area was 9993, female populations were 4957, and children of 6-14 age were 2504. These people were the target group of the LSK. If we compare this data with the census figures of 2001 we would see that illiteracy rate of Tamluk Block (excluding 0-6 age) is 21.85, Paskura-II is 21.89, Nandakumar-21.80, Mahisadal-18.21 which means that the targeted population with 31.5 percent illiterates and 32.36 percent semi-literate is a well-identified group of poor people. The lower rate of literacy indicates that characteristics.

### Activities and outline of programmes: ‘Lokashiksha Kendra’

- Early Childhood Education

All LSK’s run the Early Childhood Education Programme. Its clientele is the child of 3-5 years age. A brief outline of the programme –

- Poor children are given preference.
- Rhymes, songs, and story telling and reading and writing of alphabets/numbers are taught.
- Children learn how to keep their homes and classrooms clean and how to take care of their study materials.
- Learn about social interactions, school discipline and observance of rules.
- They get enough time to play with the peers.
- They are taught the hygienic way of drinking water and of taking food.
- Mothers’ Self Help Groups have been formed.
• At least one mother’s meeting in a month is organised. Mothers are encouraged to discuss about the performance of her child and of the Centre. Trainings imparted on sanitation, health, nutrition and income generation to the Mother.
• Mothers are encouraged to join Adult Education Centre.
• Educated mothers get involved in the organizational activities of the Early Childhood Education programme. They facilitate others to participate.
• Old age people of the locality are requested to motivate the neighboring non-willing children/Mother to join ECE.
• Per student monthly contribution is Rs.10-15. But no contribution is collected from the poorest or sponsored child.

O Non-formal educational

Out of 20, 18 LSKs started the non-formal education programme. A brief outline of the programme-
• Out of school children of 6-14 age are encouraged to join.
• Special attention is given to bring all girls and child labours.
• Curriculum learning and teaching materials and learning aids are developed by RKMKSP.
• One of the major thrusts of the non-formal education Centre is to encourage the learners of 6-9 age to get admission in a nearby primary school. In that case they would continue to get learning support from LSKs if their mother is illiterate.
• Children, unwilling to join the Primary school would be permitted to continue at LSK.

O Special Assistance Programme for the 1st generation learners of formal school.

All 20 LSKs run this programme. This programme is designed for the school-going students of 6-14 age who do not get any educational support from their parents as the family members are illiterate. They are the ‘drop-out-prone’ groups. They are helped to learn their class lessons, and other useful things in
the Special Assistance Programme. Training has been imparted to the instructors to teach these learners. The outline of the programme --

- Children of the poor and illiterate parents are encouraged to join.
- Special emphasis is given to the Language, Arithmetic and English.
- Learning always follows the school classes. Per month contribution is Rs. 10-15. No contribution is collected from the poorest child.
- Time limit: 2-3 hrs.
- Additional classes on Environment, story telling, Healthy sanitary habits and Income generation programmes.

O Adult Education

20 ‘Lokasiksha Kendras’ initiated this programme. The programme is designed for the illiterate parents of the early childhood programme but other illiterates of the community may also participate. The activity includes --

- Literacy up to functional literacy level.
- Continuing education programme would follow.
- Linkage with economic programmes and livelihood skills when basic literacy is achieved.
- Serving the scientific information need of the community and empowerment of women.
- Enabling the learners in networking with Government, Panchayet and LSP.
- Special emphasis to health, sanitation and cultural activities.

O Old Age Programme

- This programme for the old age people includes meetings, group discussions and awareness building. Old people are not the liabilities; they are the resource of society. The programme is aiming to utilize this resource for the wellbeing of the society.
- This programme is designed for the people of 50+ year.
• The main objective of the programme is to bring the old people of a village together at least once in a fortnight and to enabling them to act as a group for their betterment.

• Old age problems of health would be given first preference.

• Discussions are arranged on food habits, nutrition awareness and Legal problems.

• Old age people are encouraged to help the Library / Non-formal education Centre and cultural activities of the community.

O Lokashiksha Kendra Library

• The library primarily is for the literate learners of the community for developing their reading habit.

• Books would be given to all the literate learners enlisted through the baseline survey.

• If space were available there would be provision for newspaper- reading inside the Library.

Performance of last one year --

After training and motivation sessions the programme of LSK actually commenced from November 2002. Three Instructors were engaged for each LSK. Duties and responsibilities were earmarked for each Instructor. Youth volunteers, local elders and panchayet member were invited to attend a Workshop where group discussions provided useful inputs for the programme. The first picture of enrolment came out in the following monthly report.
PROGRESS REPORT OF LOKASIKSHA KENDRA : TAMRALIPTA : NOVEMBER, 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>No. of Learners</th>
<th>New Enrolment</th>
<th>Avg. Attendance</th>
<th>Dropouts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION</td>
<td>602</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>504</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NON-FORMAL EDUCATION</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPECIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADULT EDUCATION</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OLD AGE PROGRAMME</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIBRARY</td>
<td>Books distributed to Centres</td>
<td>Users</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>154</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In April, 2003, the enrolment position improved to a certain extent and reached the following stage –

PROGRESS REPORT OF LOKASIKSHA KENDRA : TAMRALIPTA: April- 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>No. of Learners</th>
<th>New enrolment</th>
<th>Dropouts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION</td>
<td>813</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NON-FORMAL EDUCATION</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPECIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADULT/PARENTAL EDUCATION</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OLD AGE PROGRAMME</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VILLAGE LEVEL LIBRARY</td>
<td>Books</td>
<td>Users</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>200</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assessment --

Since the programme is only one-year old, and is changing, its course, it is not a convenient time to make any final assessment of its standing. This much we can suggest that in this transitional period we have noticed some positive and negative signs, none of which could be considered conclusive for obvious reasons. We are presenting here both the positive and negative
indications assembled from monthly internal evaluations, field visits and training sessions for the benefit of the readers.

Negative indications –

A. In almost 40% of the LSKs floor space is inadequate for organizing all the above programmes. Space extension drive is not getting preference in some clubs for paucity of funds.

B. Programme for the old age is in a poor state. The villagers couldn’t understand the necessity of this effort, and old age people saw no positive return out of this programme.

C. Attitude of the local Government and the Panchayet towards this programme was not always encouraging. There was no GO-NGO partnership or public-private collaboration for this important innovation. Three ICDS schools for EC education were initiated by the Panchayet within the catchment area of the existing EC schools just before the Panchayet election, ignoring all requests from the RKM Gram Unnayan Kendra.

D. Success of the Non-formal and Adult Education programme was limited and uneven due to multiple cropping, long working hours of child labours and imperfect selection of Instructors. The Gram Unnayan Kendra and the Youth club temporarily discontinued these programmes from 25% (5) of the LSKs.

E. In some (5) Centres Non-formal and Special Assistance programme were running almost at the same time. This has caused some uneasiness and discomfort among the usually shy NFE students. In another Centre female learners opted to learn from a female Instructor where a male Instructor was selected by the club. In still another one, infighting of the local political groups ruined the unity of the villagers and thereby distracted local support towards the LSK.

Positive indications –

A. Early Childhood Education programme has covered 90% of the children of the targeted area. There are few ICDS Centres in the vicinity where the
remaining children go. This factor may reduce, even eliminate, the dropout rate from the catchment area in the coming years.

B. Popularity of the special Education programme has been increasing. It may also influence the dropout rates in the future.

C. The community has been contributing 9 to 15 percent of the project cost to sustain the programme. The major part of this donation is coming from the weaker section.

D. In forty-five percent Centres (9) different efforts like Adult Education, NFE, ECE and Special Assistance programmes have been shaping up towards coordinated and coherent enterprise of non-formal education and development.

E. Income generation programmes, self-help groups, Sanitation and Nutrition- Education programme have gained momentum after the introduction of LSKs

Conclusion --

The present paper does not have much scope for making any final conclusion about this innovative programme. For reaching a final conclusion, we require at least another year of time. But this much can be said that some positive signals about this comprehensive and innovative drive are distinguishable now. The negative features are also there, but in most of the cases these are related to the organizational factors, which can be reduced in course of time. The RKMLSP has initiated the activity of another 20 LSKs in Sonarpur Block of South 24 Parganas from December 2003. In Sonarpur the programme would be introduced in a phased manner, not in a bunch all together. The RKMLSP would try to conduct a study in December 2004, to evaluate the outcomes of these two innovative community learning programmes.