

आचार्य  
श्री नरेंद्र मोदी

ACHARYA (CHANCELLOR)  
SHRI NARENDRA MODI

उपाचार्य

प्रो. विद्युत चक्रवर्ती

UPACHARYA (VICE-CHANCELLOR)  
PROF. BIDYUT CHAKRABARTY

1  
विश्वभारती

VISVA-BHARATI

(Established by the Parliament of India under  
Visva-Bharati Act XXIX of 1951  
Vide Notification No. : 40-5/50 G.3 Dt. 14 May, 1951)

संस्थापक

रवीन्द्रनाथ ठाकुर

FOUNDED BY  
RABINDRANATH TAGORE



शांतिनिकेतन - 731235

SANTINIKETAN - 731235

जि.वीरभूम, पश्चिम बंगाल, भारत

DIST. BIRBHUM, WEST BENGAL, INDIA

फोन Tel: +91-3463-262 451/261 531

फैक्स Fax: +91-3463-262 672

ई-मेल E-mail: vice-chancellor@visva-bharati.ac.in

Website: www.visva-bharati.ac.in

सं./No. \_\_\_\_\_

दिनांक/Date. \_\_\_\_\_

*My Seventh Missive*

1 August, 2020

**To my colleagues, students, and other stakeholders surviving on and thriving because of  
Visva Bharati:**

Let me begin this missive with a disclaimer. I am both happy and sad while presenting this Missive: happy because my Missives have attracted public attention, especially from those who are fond of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore (whether because of their genuine love for what he stood for or because it served them well in fulfilling their partisan ends); sad because those who are commenting on my Missives (prominent among them are two *Ashramiks* who were associated with Visva-Bharati in certain capacities to earn their livelihoods), seem to not have had the patience to go through the Missives in their entirety. Each Missive is at least 2000 words long, and so there are approximately 12000 words to read, in all. This lack of patience is also evident in the comments made by the self-claimed custodians of Gurudev Tagore's legacy, which are to the effect that "half-baked knowledge is far more dangerous than pure ignorance". I would urge those who have always been zealous to show their so-called natural affinity (for reasons not known or never made public) with Visva-Bharati and its rich heritage to spend some of their precious time in actually reading my Missives, which are in the public domain. I am also frustrated since those who claim to have concern for the Ashram (at least in their public statements to the media) are hardly visible in any of the activities that Visva-Bharati has recently been engaged in, aside, perhaps, from the University's two flagship events (*Poush Mela* and *Basanta Utsav*) of the year.



Let me reiterate that the purpose of my weekly Missives is to understand the circumstances which contributed to Visva-Bharati's B+ in NAAC assessment and Fifty in the NIRF ranking. I am seeking to unearth the reasons because I strongly feel that those who survive and thrive because of this proverbial goose that lays golden eggs (this is what Visva-Bharati is for all of us) have a responsibility to posterity. Have we succeeded in retaining the glory of Visva-Bharati that we have inherited? The answer is perhaps "NO", for reasons that I have spelt out in my earlier Missives; these reasons are unpleasant to hear, especially for those who have knowingly joined the bandwagon to undermine, if not completely destroy Visva-Bharati, which I have earlier described as "the only industry in Birbhum". Many retired Vice Chancellors of Visva-Bharati have, after leaving the University, released write-ups documenting the rapid deterioration of Visva Bharati, in the public domain. I could have carried on this trend, but instead, I chose to write and release these missives *during* my tenure as Vice Chancellor and as a member of Visva-Bharati Parivar. I did this so that I could grab the bull by its horns and talk openly about those issues that have impeded Visva-Bharati's rise. My purpose is of, course, not to alienate those who have genuine affection for the institution and accordingly break their backs working for its well-being. I aim instead to call those individuals out whose contribution to Visva-Bharati is devoid of action and limited to sanctimonious finger-wagging.

These Missives are not by any means an attempt to wash dirty linen in public, because I am aware that that would be a disservice to this great institution with which I am now associated as its Vice Chancellor. These pieces I write are exclusively endeavours at collective introspection, which is the need of the hour. Let us remember how Visva-Bharati represents a unique centre for the creation and dissemination of knowledge, which has evolved over the decades by dint of hard work by many of our great predecessors. A leisurely walk in the Ashram will reveal this.

### **What do we need to do?**

Here is a second disclaimer. The following list of dos and don'ts that I have come up with is by no means exhaustive. I invite my colleagues, students and other stakeholders of Visva-Bharati to come forward to add to this list, which I will share with everybody who is willing to participate in the gigantic exercise of taking Visva-Bharati to the heights of excellence it previously occupied.



- 1) **Participation:** Visva-Bharati stands out among universities because it functions as a cultural hub. We have changed the official weekend from Wednesday-Thursday to Saturday-Sunday: two arguments were offered in favour of this decision in many meetings, including that of the Academic Council and Executive Council, besides those attended by the teaching and non-teaching staff and students: (a) it was raised by both the teachers and non-teaching staff that during the weekdays, Wednesday and Thursday, when they go back home, they hardly have any interaction with their spouses and kids, who are either working or at school; (b) since Wednesday is a holiday, most of the teachers, members of the non-teaching staff and students who have other work to attend to during the weekly break cannot attend the Mandir. Both these arguments are fair. Following the declaration of the weekly-off on Saturdays and Sundays, however, we noticed that the second appeared to have been made in bad faith, as the desire to come to the Mandir turned out to be a merely verbal commitment for the majority. A visit to the regularly-held Mandir on Wednesday will prove this. Out of the roughly 15,000 members on campus, an abysmally low number join the collective prayer at the Mandir on Wednesdays. Now, of course, because of the COVID-19 restrictions, the number has legitimately dwindled as students are not on campus, although it would not be unfair to expect teachers and non-staff members of the community to attend.
- 2) Similar is the situation in *Baitaliks* (the very limited number of early morning congregations) which take place during special cultural events in the *Ashram* and are one of the pillars of *Rabindrik* tradition. My constant requests led only to a small increase in participation both in Santiniketan and Sriniketan, and most of my colleagues continue to attribute their absence during *Baitaliks* to their inability to get up early in the morning although we have very few *Baitaliks* in a year. Besides, there are many occasions when my colleagues happily get up early in the morning, for instance, those who return to Santiniketan by Ganadevata Express, which leaves its terminus in Kolkata very early in the morning. I am told that there are many colleagues who take this train almost every week. It is understandable therefore that I take their “inability” to get up four or five times a year in the morning for *Baitaliks* as their lack of interest in participating.
- 3) **Poush Mela:** I shall concentrate on the 2019 Poush Mela, since this was the one in which I was deeply involved right from the organizational stage. We had set up the camp office ten days before the Mela was inaugurated; the entire Vice Chancellor’s



Secretariat was shifted to the camp office to keep constant vigil over the setting up of stalls and associated infrastructure. Let us note that this Mela was special, in that it was the first Mela in several decades that was organized entirely by the teachers, students, non-teaching staff and pensioners of the university. I was assisted in this mammoth undertaking by a very small group of colleagues who worked day and night to organize the Mela as per the directions of the National Green Tribunal, in the face of the stern opposition of the local businessmen and those whose pockets took a hit with the way the Mela was being organized. Let me now offer a statistic: around 453 colleagues came to the camp to collect Car Passes, but when we called for volunteers to aid us with the smooth functioning of the Mela, hardly fifty colleagues heeded the call and showed up to work alongside the 100 security personnel (sent by the Prime Minister's Office), and the more than 180 volunteers from the Satya Sai Trust who cleaned the Mela grounds regularly for the entire duration of the Mela.

- 4) **Ownership:** After I joined Visva-Bharati in November, 2018, what was most striking to me was the absence of "ownership" in all those who survive and thrive because of Visva-Bharati. Being a sustained source of income for both its employees and those whose business ventures rely heavily on the tourists that descend on the Visva-Bharati campus throughout the year for a quasi Rabindrik pilgrimage, the University is useful to everybody. However, there is a tragic dearth of genuine love for the University itself: it is only appreciated and fought for as long as it serves as a means for selfish ends. How else does one explain the frequent and sordid fights in Bhavans/departments among colleagues, which go so far as to need the intervention of the Vice Chancellor and other senior officers?

**Let me explain what I mean by ownership.** Whenever a battle is waged to sustain or recover Visva-Bharati's glory, fierce opposition is inevitable. One can have a quick glimpse of what has so far been done by the administration in service of this goal by simply checking the reduction of the number of **Paras**, so far, in the **AUDIT OBJECTIONS**. Furthermore, this administration is determined to plug the holes through which corruption has seeped in so far. It will now therefore not be permissible to draw lakhs and lakhs of money as GPF without discharging the duties for which one is given this benefits.

**Despite being aware of and also having seen the visible changes in the functioning of the University,** the self-proclaimed custodians of Rabindrik traditions lose no time in denouncing as anti-Rabindrik our on-the-ground efforts to actualize Gurudev's



socio-political vision. It is therefore not unnatural that we never find them during said constructive endeavours, such as when the University was providing relief to the villagers around the campus who had lost their livelihoods due to the Coronavirus pandemic, or when we raised funds for the family of a martyr from our district, or when we were engaged in uprooting parthenium in the campus. Curiously enough, when these activities take place, the aforementioned “custodians” of Visva-Bharati become extremely reluctant to part with their own money, and are quite occupied with concerns of their health. There is a set pattern to how they express their disapproval: the Vice Chancellor is threatened with letters of complaints to the Hon’ble President of India, Hon’ble Prime Minister of India and Hon’ble MHRD Minister. I have a respectful suggestion for our self-proclaimed *Rabindriks*: if you are facing a lack of information regarding the intentions and actions of the administration, please check the Visva-Bharati website for my regularly transmitted Missives. If, after reading the Missives in their entirety, you are still doubtful regarding our sincerity, please come down to work with us, so that you can see with your own eyes how genuinely and affectionately we work for Visva-Bharati’s wellbeing.

- 5) **Belongingness:** When I joined Visva-Bharati in 2018, I was always surrounded by a bevy of colleagues, which prompted one of my other colleagues to say, “Sir, you have around you the CAGs and CASs”. I was unable to decipher the acronym. My colleague explained that CAGs are those who, according to the audit report prepared by the CAG-sent Audit Team, have made use of illegal benefits that they have received, while CAS refers to individuals who flock around the Vice Chancellor in hopes of securing promotions to higher ranks. Upon hearing this explanation, things slowly fell into place. I realized that perhaps the reason why a shockingly large number of colleagues had come for the Gandhi *Punyaha* on 10 March, 2019 was that it was the same day that interviews for CAS promotion was held. My hypothesis that these colleagues had come simply to curry favour was strengthened when they did not show up for the next Gandhi *Punyaha*, in 2020.
- 6) **Commitment:** Like any collective venture, a university thrives once likeminded people congregate to accomplish a common mission. The task may appear impossible, unless the collectivity privileges the common goal over individual ends. What is expected of the beneficiaries of Visva-Bharati’s rich legacy is their commitment to those values and ideals which Gurudev had articulated while building this great seat of learning. The commitment I speak of has very little to do with merely verbal appreciation of the so-



called *Rabindrik* values; it has everything to do with joining hands and working with the people at the grassroots by enabling, enskilling and thus empowering them. We all need to play a role in sustaining and strengthening the unique blend of academic and cultural pursuits that Visva-Bharati has always represented. It would not be out of place here to invoke Gurudev himself: in his communication with the essayist Sajanikanta Das in the 1940s, he sharply indicted those who, in a bid to secure partisan gains, falsely champion divisive politics as a means of social uplift.

- 7) **Hard work:** That there is no substitute for hard work needs no justification. Tragically, the general trend shows that the hard work a student puts into their doctoral/post-doctoral studies falls dramatically once they get a permanent academic position. One of the most widely-accepted explanations of this phenomenon is that when one gets a job in the academia, especially in colleges and universities in India, one does not require to continue proving one's worth as a scholar. Academia has no Annual Confidential Report like bureaucracy does (for example, the stringent assessments undergone by those who are part of the steel frame of India's governance). Recently, the UGC has introduced the API (Academic Performance Indicators) score as part of ascertaining who will be eligible for new appointment and promotion to higher ranks. While this new criterion has motivated a lot of capable researchers to continue being productive, it has unfortunately also set the stage for those who don't really value research to accrue API points through highly nefarious channels. Let me illustrate this by reference to my experience in Visva Bharati. As soon as I joined, I assured my colleagues that CAS promotion would be my top priority, a promise that I fulfilled: Fifty-Nine out of Sixty-Seven of colleagues were promoted by strictly adhering to due process. Recently, my attention was drawn to a number of cases where the successful candidate's API was not counted properly, as allegedly plagiarized publications were said to have been included in the count. Furthermore, there are three cases of promotion in a non-Science Bhavana which was done in the earlier regime by wrongly calculating API. It has been brought to my notice that the colleagues who were promoted wrongly received points by taking classes in another university, which was shown as seminar-attendance. To look into this, an enquiry committee was constituted; but it was not allowed to complete its task for reasons which are not very difficult to fathom since here in Visva-Bharati, the Big Brother syndrome used to plague all administrative decision-making. I have tried but failed to get the papers, for this reason. Even a just-retired colleague who was involved in the enquiry declined to help me in collating the papers after he was allegedly



threatened by those who gained undue benefits by resorting to unlawful and immoral methods of calculating API. Nonetheless, the instruction from the MHRD to enquire into these cases shall be followed. Now, if an adverse decision is taken by the higher authorities, this will not only show Visva-Bharati in a bad light, but also jeopardize its future, besides being a source of heart-burn to those who will be at the receiving end of a decision seeking to address this serious anomaly.

It would not be out of place here to mention that the MHRD had prepared a list of Fifty-Six supposedly illegal appointments made during the reign of one my predecessors, Professor Susanta Duttagupta. This list alleged that these candidates had been recruited by blatantly violating all rules and regulations. After I joined, the number was slashed to twenty-four illegal recruitments, and I was asked to enquire into these cases. I have begun the enquiry, as directed by the MHRD. The preliminary report shows that *prima facie*, there are unfortunately many anomalies which were committed while selecting specific candidates for university jobs at the level of Assistant Professor, Associate Professor and Professor. Here too, the outcome is not likely to be pleasant if it is proved that these appointments were made illegally: the Vice Chancellor in particular, and his colleagues in the administration in general, are certain to be pilloried by those who will lose the benefits.

- 8) **Willingness to accommodate and embrace diversity:** My readers might be aware that the present university administration has brought about radical changes in the functioning of the weekly prayers, held in the Mandir. The change that we are proudest of is the selection of Acharyas from a diverse set of backgrounds. Post the lockdown, our weekly Mandirs have been graced by the frontline soldiers who are fighting against COVID-19, from doctors and janitorial (cleaning) staff to security personnel and police. This has been a part of our mission to democratize the rarefied spaces of Visva-Bharati, a movement that Gurudev Tagore spearheaded by integrating the institution of Visva-Bharati with its neighbouring villages regardless of caste, religion and socio-economic rifts. For Tagore, the Mandir was as much a site for collectivization and solidarity as it was a spiritual conduit. We would like to hope that our quest to diversify who gets to be Acharya will help us fulfil Tagore's concerns for inclusivity and fraternity.
- 9) **Willingness to move with the times:** This is perhaps the most important point in this Missive. It may even be seen as the overarching exhortation that runs through all the points made above. Implicit in most of the concerns aired by our colleagues with regard to the steps (administrative and otherwise) that have been taken in the recent past is a



massive fear of change, which stems from a faulty understanding of change as deviance, rather than as progress or evolution for betterment. I trust that I don't need to explain how dangerously regressive this attitude is. Suffice it to say that heritage is not a timeless monolith; we create it every day. Tagore laid a solid foundation for Visva-Bharati; it is up to us to strengthen the institution by being malleable and receptive to the winds of change.

This Missive has outlined what needs to be done in order to bring Visva-Bharati back to its rightful spot on the global academic stage. It is my firm conviction that this goal is highly attainable, provided we all keep in mind the past glory of Visva-Bharati while simultaneously being receptive to the winds of change. As stewards of Visva-Bharati's legacy, it is incumbent upon the administration, teachers, students, alumni and other stakeholders to put the University's well-being above all self-gratifying interests. It is now time to uproot those well-entrenched, self-gratifying patterns of behaviour that have retarded Visva-Bharati's progress and thus prevented it from reaching the heights that its well-wishers expected it to.

The COVID-19 pandemic appears to be unrelenting. We must come together as a community in spirit, if not in body, to combat this invisible enemy. Hence, I would urge you all, once again, to stay socially connected while maintaining physical distance. Please wear your masks, and stay safe.

Keep the faith,

*Bidyut Chakrabarty*  
Bidyut Chakrabarty  
1/08/2020



Vice-Chancellor  
Visva-Bharati  
Santiniketan  
West Bengal-731235  
India