

आचार्य
श्री नरेंद्र मोदी
ACHARYA (CHANCELLOR)
SHRI NARENDRA MODI
उपाचार्य
प्रो. विद्युत चक्रवर्ती
UPACHARYA (VICE-CHANCELLOR)
PROF. BIDYUT CHAKRABARTY

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
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सं./No. _____

दिनांक/Date. _____

My Ninth Missive

15 August, 2020

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

The vision that Gurudev Tagore had for Visva-Bharati was that it would grow into an institution worthy of global recognition and global relevance. It is tragic that instead of working to fulfil Gurudev's dreams, we have undermined the legacy and potential of this institution by prioritizing the partisan (and often nefarious) interests of various local agents who don't have the institution's best interests at heart. Our administrative efforts are deliberately misinterpreted and massively vilified whenever they pose an obstacle to the seeking of profit. Visva-Bharati's wings have been clipped so as to ensure that it remains a playground exclusively for certain local agendas.

Image of Visva-Bharati

What is worrisome is the reluctance to join Visva-Bharati that outsiders display because they are scared of being unnecessarily heckled. My experience in failing to persuade two/three competent individuals, staying elsewhere in the country, to join the University as Registrar and Finance Officer has shown that the apprehension does not seem to be devoid of any substance. Furthermore, there are good scholars who join Visva-Bharati as a stepping stone to get jobs elsewhere according to their choice. This is, of course, not axiomatic since many good scholars who came from outside West Bengal stayed back and have helped sustain and

build Visva-Bharati's reputation. Their numbers are, alas, dwindling fast. One of the reasons is certainly the image of Visva-Bharati being a place of intrigues in which everybody, regardless of rank, happily gets drawn to deliberately create a situation of uncertainty; and those who are really disturbed by these nefarious activities play safe by escaping the fire when it is likely to cause them harm. A selfish design, it will, if allowed to thrive, adversely affect everybody either today or tomorrow. This was more or less anticipated when officials of the university were physically assaulted in the presence of one of the erstwhile Vice Chancellors and no police complaint was lodged presumably because of the over-hyped "fear psychosis" that prevailed in the campus largely due to the escapist attitude of those associated with Visva-Bharati. Those who remained indifferent for reasons best known to them while injustices were committed have also had their share of responsibility in encouraging the miscreants to rear their ugly heads.

It is true that there existed a group of our colleagues who prevailed over others by allegedly being politically powerful or having massive lung power in hurling abuse (or hitting others below the belt) or being capable of physically attacking the opponents. The University was, as it were, a battle field. I had a taste of their hooliganism when I stood up in opposition to their illegal demands in May, 2019 when more than 200 of my non-teaching colleagues came to my private residence, Purbita, to threaten me by flexing their muscles and force me to commit to the release of the 7th CPC arrears. My lady colleague, Prof. Asha Mukherjee, was also not spared and was made subject to all kinds of humiliation in the presence of those who led that unruly crowd. This incident was enough to prove that those who claim to be Rabindrik can be anything but being Rabindrik since their body language and also verbal abuses to me, Prof. VC Jha and Prof. Asha Mukherjee show that, for them, being Rabindrik, was just a cloak to pursue partisan interests. This group of more than 200 non-teaching colleagues thought that by showing the strength of the crowd, they would force the Vice Chancellor to toe their line as perhaps was the pattern in the past. So, when they went back empty-handed, they sat together to devise a set of plans to further heckle the Vice Chancellor. The event of 19 October, 2019 was another such example when the Vice Chancellor was locked in to force him to withdraw a transfer order since it was issued without consulting the Karmi Sabha, the so-called *defacto* ruler of the University; in fact, when the Karmi Sabha members barged into my room along with the self-proclaimed leader (since retired) who raised his voice to question the Vice Chancellor for having had the audacity of transferring one of their colleagues (I am not sure whether the word henchman is not far more appropriate here) without consulting

them. Their courage however dissipated as soon as other colleagues who stood for peace and tranquillity in the campus descended upon my office in large numbers. We saw in the CCTV footage that these self-proclaimed Rabindriks disappeared as fast as they could which demonstrated how weak they truly were. Eighty-Six of our colleagues were given show cause notices and a majority tendered unconditional apology; we gave another chance and except three of the miscreants, everybody apologised. A high-power judicial committee is now looking into the matter to ascertain whether they deserve to be punished for harassing and also obstructing the Vice Chancellor from discharging his assigned roles. What is surprising is that the self-proclaimed leader (since retired) is seeking to escape the inevitable by resorting to one means or the other. The careers of those who joined the bandwagon on 19 October, 2019 will be adversely affected, though the leader (since retired) is determined to avoid the torture of undergoing the concomitant stress for legal cross-examinations by the judicial authority.

The Very Common Pattern

There has been a pattern in the interaction of those in Visva-Bharati and the Vice Chancellor (who is invariably an outsider): provided the administration approves of the demands regardless of whether they are rule-driven or not, the campus remains peaceful and Vice Chancellor is admired for being “supportive”. Once administration draws on rules and regulations to decide on whether the step is permissible or not, the bonhomie shows cracks. The situation gets worse as the unjust demands are not allowed and thus discarded which infuriate those who make these demands. As a result, the Vice Chancellor becomes a villain and the miscreants join hands to form a *morcha* for REMOVAL OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR since s/he is a stumbling block towards fulfilling their self-driven agenda. History substantiates the claim that I have just made above. One of the major reasons for the University’s suffering was the violation of rules and regulations which is evident in serious Audit Objections that we are addressing now. Furthermore, as the recent past has shown, the volatile circumstances that had emerged following the stepping down of a former (permanent) Vice Chancellor, created a chaotic situation in which University remained pretty much without a legitimate head, and no substantial decisions were taken as the incumbent had no substantive power. As a result, the University became the fiefdom of one group or the other, and the situation got worse since those who were formally associated with Visva-Bharati preferred to remain indifferent. It is a matter of great humiliation that University officers were assaulted in the presence of the authorities in the official premises, and this was not even

pursued with the police presumably because of the deep-rooted fear of backlash by the miscreants against those who were administratively responsible for managing the University. The voice of opposition among the stakeholders against these demeaning incidents never became as loud as was expected, though it became a source of public entertainment since the event received adequate media coverage. I raised this issue when I got a chance; and the answer that I received confirms my apprehension that the stakeholders' indifference was due to their lack of a sense of ownership. After I joined in 2018, I was also a victim of the mentality of some of our colleagues who considered Visva-Bharati as their empire. I have referred to some of the incidents in this Missive that took place in my private residence, Purbita in the presence of other academic colleagues and in my office in the campus, which were nothing but endeavours at muscle-flexing by some of our non-teaching colleagues for sustaining their unassailable control (or *Dadagiri* in local parlance) over administration. The situation has however undergone a sea-change, I am happy to announce. With the coming together of those who deeply love this great seat of learning, the miscreants appear to have realized that MIGHT IS NOT RIGHT and nor it is always an effective instrument to muzzle the voice calling for the right cause. I am happy to share that the number of those who are keen to participate in processes of purging the miscreants of the campus is rapidly increasing day-by-day, which also substantiates the general claim that Visva-Bharati has a bright future.

There is another pattern which is more than common: here if the faculty members, students or stakeholders (including the self-centric local businessmen) are unhappy with the Visva-Bharati authority since their demands are not fulfilled, they immediately write to the President, Prime Minister and other dignitaries hoping that the Visva-Bharati administration will be forced to concede their demands, even if they are deviant of the rules and regulations. It is true that Visva-Bharati lacks the resources that some of other universities in the country have. We don't have a Corpus Fund despite my repeated requests to my colleagues to voluntarily contribute to create one, something that exists in almost all academic institutions. We have recently opened a bank account (in the SBI) to start a Corpus Fund and it has already been announced in our Website; let's see how it develops. We have also devised a scheme for helping the students coming from the socio-economically marginalized sections of society to pay their fees and other charges to the University in case they are financially too weak to shoulder the responsibility. I make an appeal to the teachers, non-teaching staff and other stakeholders to contribute voluntarily as much as they are willing to support Visva-Bharati in this great venture. I would also urge those colleagues who write to the Hon'ble Prime

Minister, President and other dignitaries at the drop of the hat to write to them in case they can be of help in fulfilling our goal. I reinforce my appeal by urging these colleagues who are self-claimed votaries of the hapless and guardianless people of India by merely paying lip service to their miseries that history does not seem to be kind to those who are reluctant to learn from the past. It would be a much more productive usage of the time, concern and energy of these faculty members if, instead of pouring their efforts, grievances and constructive inputs into writing these letters, they would join hands with their colleagues and administration to put all that directly into improving the state of affairs at Visva-Bharati.

Going Ahead

In response to my 7th Missive, I have received good suggestions from my colleagues. I appreciate them for having taken out their precious time to ponder over the issues I raised. Having admitted that Visva-Bharati's problems, including its academic limitations need to be addressed collectively, the colleagues identified the lack of adequate infrastructural facility as responsible for Visva-Bharati's faculties' (especially in Siksha Bhavana) inability to produce high-impact-factor research papers which naturally has adversely affected our NAAC and NIRF rankings. The point is well-taken with a piece of information. In view of the shrinking of public funding for research in public universities, the only alternative that we can explore is to generate funds for research from private sources, including the corporate houses. Given the fixed amount of money that the Corporate Houses keep to serve their Corporate Social Responsibility, this could be a source of funding for our developmental activities. We have to collectively explore these sources. Let me also share that I have been trying relentlessly to receive an One-Time Developmental Grant by approaching the Hon'ble Chancellor; I am hoping that our effort will succeed and help us address some of the concerns that my colleagues from the Science departments have expressed. The other point made in my colleagues' responses is about the bureaucratic delay in clearing some of the files. This is also a genuine point that needs immediate attention, though the administration is handicapped because the University is under scanner by the Ministry for being serial deviant of rules and regulation. Yes, there are delays in releasing files that involve clearance by the FO and IAO when they deal with financial transactions which is inevitable when there are many instances of gross violation of GFR by the University staff members. Here, let me mention that we have a faculty member, who, for instance, spent 38 lakh for a project in violation of GFR? If our colleagues are involved in these kinds of nefarious acts what is the way out? The Comptroller and Auditor General will hold the administration responsible. There are many such cases of

financial irregularities committed by our colleagues. We found out recently that one of our colleagues submitted two bill's for the same claim: one earlier in February, 2020 and another just by the end of July, 2020. Now, if we avoided checking the financial claims stringently, we would have been caught in the wrong foot. We must be truthful and trustworthy. I am against bureaucratization of administration, but there appears to be no alternative. I urge my colleague to please come to my office to check the Audit Paras regarding financial irregularities committed by our colleagues. We need to address them to the CAG's satisfaction; otherwise the university will have to pay a hefty penalty. Shamefully enough, it is also in the public domain that a salary was being regularly released against a ghost employee, all with the complicity of our colleagues. This was allowed to continue for years, and was addressed by the administration a couple of months ago. There are 47 such cases of financial bungling which need to be addressed by March, 2021 to avoid the denial of our regular financial grant from the funding agency.

Now, we are engaged in the second NAAC accreditation and all my colleagues are working day-and-night to ensure that Visva-Bharati gets the rank it deserves. I have come to understand that Visva-Bharati's B+ NAAC rank last time was partly an outcome of sabotage from the inside; it became obvious when one of the members of the visiting NAAC team was forced to say that "it was not a grievance-redressal committee". Many of our colleagues, perhaps in connivance with outsiders having business interests in Visva-Bharati, took part in this abominable act though they forgot that lower NAAC rankings would not only put a permanent embargo on Visva-Bharati for more grants for its development but also adversely affect its image as a centre for learning with which the great legacy of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore is associated. It was a hara-kiri which some of us derived pleasure from by seeking to kill the proverbial goose regularly laying golden eggs. In view of our past experiences, I urge all my colleagues and also other stakeholders to work together for the NAAC accreditation this time, since a good grading will be good for all of us. With our intellectual resources and the hard work that our colleagues have already put in, higher NAAC grade (proportionate to Visva-Bharati's natural reputation) does not seem be unattainable, at all.

I am highly optimistic that we will succeed in putting all heads together to successfully sail through the crises that have plagued Visva-Bharati so far. I am sure that honesty, truthfulness and hard work will help us achieve our goal. As an example of the power of these values, I shall narrate my personal experience of how the public transport (underground Railway, Bus

services) in some of the West European countries and particularly in Scandinavian countries ply most efficiently. It is a matter of great surprise that there are hardly any human officers to collect fares from those taking public transport. Those who travel in public transport are neither stopped nor asked to show their tickets or passes. In some of the underground trains, there are no drivers even. Despite the absence of ticket-checkers, the public transport system in these countries has hardly been crippled due to lack of funds for sustaining its services. The system runs because of trust, and the truthfulness of the citizens of these countries; they neither cheat the public authority nor ever nurture the idea of not paying for the service that the public transport system renders to them. Here is a lesson for all of us. A huge public facility is made available to the public not on the basis of suspicion, but on the established behavioural pattern of the commuters in public transport based on TRUST and TRUTHFULNESS. I have strong reasons to believe that we, in Visva-Bharati, are trustworthy and truthful to the mission that Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore had begun with the establishment of Visva-Bharati in 1921. In every system, there are a few miscreants who can easily be weeded out. In my stint of close to two years I have begun believing that most of my colleagues and other stakeholders are inspired to fight for the noble cause that Visva-Bharati represents. The Gurudev-founded Visva-Bharati is, to most of us, an opportunity to participate in nation-building in the 21st century with those rare inputs which no other university has access to since it is built and also has organically evolved out of the sustained efforts of our great illustrious predecessors for inclusive education.

Visva-Bharati's uniqueness

An institution has both strength and weaknesses. Since Visva-Bharati began its journey in the arena of creation and dissemination of knowledge with the great legacy of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, those who join the University as employees and those who are instinctively Rabindrik (in its positive sense) automatically become heir to the rich tradition that unfolded with its foundation in 1921. Visva-Bharati is not a conventional university, it is a mode of transmitting values in a specific ideological mould tuned to common well-being, irrespective of class, creed and ethnicity. Gurudev devoted his life to the creation of a mindset for an inclusive society because he believed that 'we are waiting for the time when the spirit of the age will be incarnated in a complete human truth and the meeting of men will be translated into the Unity of Man'. (Rabindranath Tagore, 'the voice of humanity'). Core to his belief was the evolution of a global space

*Where the mind is without fear
and the head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been
broken up into fragments
by narrow domestic walls; ...
Where the clear stream of reason
has not lost its way into the
dreary desert sand of dead habit; ...
Into that heaven of freedom,
my Father, let my country awake.*

I end this Missive with an earnest request to stay safe and vigilant, for COVID-19 does not appear to be any less virulent. Please follow the instructions of medical professionals, including the maintenance of physical distance, while remaining socially connected, to keep the virus at bay.

Keep the faith.

Bidyut Chakrabarty
Bidyut Chakrabarty 15 August, 2020



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