

## **Missive- July, 2023**

What is a university or, in Indian parlance Vishwavidyalaya. Out of my common sense, since I am neither a linguist nor an entomologist, I prefer to define it as a space where one gets emotionally and spiritually linked with the world. This is a space where the feeling of being part of the universe is realized by having access to sources of knowledge which are points of coming together of learners across the world. There must be a caveat since universities are institutionally authorized to disseminate and also create opportunities for generating knowledge. Epistemologically, this is how a university is conceptualized: it is clearly the place where, by being interactive with the learners (through bartalap, to use an indigenous expression) the teachers prepare them for further responsibilities and also for developing a skill for challenging the derivative and established systems of knowledge for advancing and expanding the horizons of knowledge. Universities or places of debate for ascertaining or rejecting ideas, conceptual frameworks and mode of thinking etc., are integral to the development of human civilization. This is however not to suggest that universities are the sole custodians of knowledge because there are instances to demonstrate that knowledge is also created and transmitted in non-institutional set-up.

Universities are fora for change since rigidity is detrimental to the development of curiosity and unless one is inquisitive, the inspiration to explore the unknown will gradually die. Here, the role of teachers is equally critical

What is most alarming is the politicization of universities. Politicization by itself is not desirable but its distorted version is both harmful and debilitating because it is reduced to a space to flex muscle by those who are physically stronger with support from outside. Here, it does not seem improper to define politicization: on the one hand, it means processes for acquainting and also preparing the students in the campus for helping the political activists to capture power. Hence, they tend to get involved in campaigns at the behest of many political parties with the hope of extracting their pound of flesh from them in case they succeed in winning power. They prefer to remain associated with those parties which, they think, are useful for fulfilling their partisan interests or politico-ideological objectives. Politicization has another connotation: it is also an expression which has a specific and a wider meaning. Politicization entails processes equipping students for participation in movements and campaigns for meaningfully transforming the prevalent inter-personal and inter-community socio-economic relationships. So, it is a design for radical changes in the available power-relationships in society. There are instances from the British era and also in its aftermath. The nationalists inspired the students across the country to take part in their battle against foreign hegemony. In independent India, many students from many campuses happily joined the Naxalbari Movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Students who zealously took part in the campaign were drawn to the Maoist mode of replacing the exploitative society by an egalitarian system of human existence. Politicization is desirable

and thus needs to be encouraged to ignite the learners in the campuses for being involved in movements for radical socio-economic changes.

Contrary to what has been stated above, politicization in the province means expansion of authority of those who appear to enjoy time outside classrooms or laboratories as per their choice. Here, I would like to draw on my experiences as a teacher in Delhi University and Vice Chancellor of Visva-Bharati. In order to persuasively argue my point, I may draw on my experiences as a teacher in foreign universities. Instead of describing my experiences, I shall make my points which are specifically-general and generally-specific. Let me elaborate what I mean by this set of expressions. Here, I propose to highlight issues which campuses in India confront; so, they are general in character. There are certain specific issues which are peculiar to some of the campuses, including Visva-Bharati. Let me also add a disclaimer here. My purpose is not wash dirty linens in public, but to raise issues which are indicative of the problem areas and also to suggest probable modes of meaningfully addressing them.

### **Political interference**

Our universities are worse victims of political interference by outside forces who are generally welcomed by few of the deviant students for advancing their personal agenda. It appears that they don't come to the university for academic pursuits, but for other purposes for which universities are a good platform. In fact, it will not be an exaggeration to suggest that universities are nurseries for evolving both good virtues and also partisan tendencies. In the past, especially during the era of freedom struggle and also those periods of history when students were ready to make supreme sacrifices for the mission. Now, I am a witness to changes in students' behaviour towards teachers though I don't blame them since today's students are tomorrow's teachers. So, how can one expect different behavioural traits by those who were encouraged to express their anger to their gurus not in a very decent manner. Once these students become teachers, that they will not be treated with respect by their students is too obvious to require further elaboration.

Vice Chancellors are punching bags for the students, teachers, members of non-teaching staff, ministries and other stakeholders. In Visva-Bharati, students in connivance with a select group of teachers are hardly hesitant to adopt policies which are not civilized but bordering on barbarism. Some of the students who concentrate on activities which are likely to give them dividends are generally guided by some of the members of Visva-Bharati's academic community with unreliable credentials. The so-called mentors who are several thousand miles away from creative research derive immense pleasure since it gives them an opportunity to fruitfully utilize their time. So, it was a nexus that, by drawing on each other, thrive in the campus. The circle remains incomplete so long as political forces outside stay away. As soon as they join, the miscreants receive extra energy for fulfilling their exclusive objectives. They generally triumph since they hardly face an opposition because most of the students who join a university prefer not to oppose them because it means loss of time, energy and also their mental peace. The unholy congregation

and the absence of opposition complemented by the indifference of most of the teachers, students, non-teaching staff members and other stakeholders. The situation, thus emerged, is not exclusive to Visva-Bharati but across the country.

### **Why is Visva-Bharati always in the media?**

There is no denying that Visva-Bharati is always in the news by default. There are many young souls who, for their survival, turn into journalists; most of them are not journalists, unfortunately. Hence, they tend to pick inputs to make their stories sensational and hence will attract readers and hence will enhance the TRP of the newspaper or TV channel with which they are associated for a regular flow of pecuniary benefits. In a state where there is dearth of fruitful employment, such an effort is praiseworthy. But, the tendency to become an expert of writing stories for TABLOIDS does not seem to be a healthy practice in case they would like to be a journalists in the real sense of the term. Sometimes, they also pay the price by being deviant from the established code of conduct for them. In early 2023, a budding journalist was kicked out by the media house because of her/his involvement in nefarious activities which resulted in defaming the employer. The entire team of his/her colleagues was just removed along with the kingpin. But, this is a rare instance. I understand the predicament of the so-called journalists. They know that if their story is accepted by the media house, their kitchen will function. So, even hearsay warrants their attention. Visva-Bharati is a marketable name. Even if the Vice Chancellor, while going to office, takes a different route that immediately becomes the plot of a story. And, those who select stories for public consumption at the higher echelon do not seem to apply their mind while discharging their assigned duties. It is unfortunate although this is what is prevailing in West Bengal and especially among those who survive on stories linked with Visva-Bharati. This is more so perhaps due to the fact that Visva-Bharati is that holy cow which also provides livelihood to those who do not bother about morality and do not also consider that the existence of Visva-Bharati is required to be maintained for their survival with at least two meals a day. Nobody deserves to be blamed because given the dearth of proper means of livelihood, these young men and women appear to have learnt instinctively what the readers want and they file those stories which will increase the sale of the newspapers or will enhance the viewers in visual media. The result is, of course, disastrous because it (a) consolidates the foundation of yellow journalism and consequently weakens the possibility of the growth of healthy journalism and (b) ends up with creating generation of readers who are misfed with inputs which are neither intellectually challenging nor helpful in building sound minds capable of questioning what is socially undesirable.

Visva-Bharati is a victim of practices undertaken by those who claim themselves as journalists. How to reverse the trend is a million dollar question since it has evolved over many years. The so-called journalists, in order to please those who are kind enough to offer them a regular income and the local chieftains who save them from being distributed, gradually turned them to cater to what helps them derive maximum dividends. My experience with them during my tenure as Vice Chancellor of Visva-Bharati confirms that there is no point in expecting that the nature of

journalism will change soon because media houses are governed by those business tycoons who thrive by serving the political bosses of the day. One may attribute this to the overall moral decadence of human beings across the countries. Perhaps, it is so. Nonetheless, it is a matter of universal concern that the decline of bold and truthful journalism is also a manifestation of overall moral dwarfing of social beings. Unless, it is arrested, the future of humanity does not seem to be anything but bleak.

### **NIRF Ranking**

Despite very very marginal improvement in Visva-Bharati's ranking in the NIRF ranking, the detractors began hurling abuse at the Vice Chancellor as if he is responsible for this decline. Since they are not not stupids given the fact that they get jobs through a duly constituted selection committee comprising experts in the field of studies. The NIRF ranking is decided primarily on the academic performance of the faculties of the academic departments which means that the academic contributions of faculties associated with fifty seven departments (in eight faculties) are taken into account to fix the ranking in the chart. The critics are aware of this because they are not so stupid. Primarily the academic achievements count in deciding the rank of the academic institutions. One of the criteria is the availability of infrastructure to ascertain that the learners do confront serious difficulties in the classrooms, departments, libraries and other places which they need for the pursuit of their assigned degrees.

What is most disappointing is that Visva-Bharati obtained ZERO in so far as filing of patent is concerned. The scene is appalling because Visva-Bharati has been getting since ranking began although it has many self-proclaimed great academics in its payroll. Those associated with science department should ponder seriously on this issue. Furthermore, there are departments where teachers are reluctant to supervise doctoral students because it means extra work which also hard work and extra time with the learners. Visva-Bharati has got less points in so far as admittance of foreign students. As it is no longer as attractive university as in the past, the university does not have many students from abroad. Our university has about nearly 400 foreign students who are mainly from Bangladesh; we get students from our neighbouring country because Indian Council of Cultural Relations provide support those selected students from Bangladesh and other SAARC countries. Here, Visva-Bharati is handicapped. As everybody knows, including the stupid critic, without university's academic prowess, it is difficult to draw foreign students who prefer to go for those institutions which give them access to teaching by quality teachers; which make them feel proud because they know that not only do they get good training, they also become marketable in the job market. Apart from a handful of departments, it is very unfortunate that our students do not get jobs as per what they gain by pursuing a particular course of studies. It is also true that Visva-Bharati has taken onto itself the responsibility of spreading education to many first generation learners which requires that teachers should be more sensitive to that aspect of pedagogy helping these students address their weaknesses soon. The sooner it is done, the better for the university.

My purpose is not blame the faculty members, but to sensitive them that mere abuse to the Vice Chancellor will lead them nowhere except it will bring bad name to those who involved in these nefarious activities despite being indebted to the university in several ways. The administration cannot be held responsible. Those associated with dissemination of knowledge out of a fat monthly salary are required to be more respectful to their responsibility. The teachers in Science Faculty should focus on their research more than what they are doing now. Teachers in Social Science departments need to reorient themselves in such a way so that not only will they be exposed to the new vistas of knowledge but also be adequately equipped to inspire the taught. Let add to the narrative by sharing my experience as chairman of many Selection Committees. I am sorry to admit that many of our faculties appear to be negligent of basics of any area of specialization. For instance, a colleague who claims himself to be a Marxist, does not know that Karl Marx wrote Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, Class War in France or Civil War in France although this gentleman is an expert in writing long letters to the highest authorities of the country identifying the self-concocted lacunas of the university authorities. I was shocked when I find that not many are not acquainted with even Tagore's creative literary texts or innovative essays. What is worth referring here is also the fact that those who come for the interview claim that they read most of Tagore's texts; that they were lying was proved when they were asked question on novels other than Ghate Baire (1916) and Gora (1910) presumably they are taught as part of the syllabi. I remember one instance when a professor with dubious reputation asked me a question by searching for Tagore's writings in his mobile phone. Despite his abortive search, he asked me a question which I don't want repeat to expose his awful academic standard notwithstanding his sustained claim that he was trained by one of the best minds in Social Sciences. There is another teacher who, in his late 40s failed to complete his doctoral studies despite many futile attempts. What is unfortunate is if they don't get their promotion to a higher position they put the blame on others. Perhaps due to the fact that candidates are assessed by the best minds of the country, they don't qualify to be promoted. The disqualified candidates never take it as a challenge that failure is the pillar of success. Or, failure is a pathway to achievement. It is also unfortunate that our students are deprived of teaching by good teachers in many departments. The prevalent administration has taken up this matter seriously and hopefully, the future will prove that the effort is not futile.

As Vice Chancellor of this great academic seat of learning associated with a great son of Bharat Mata, the 1913 Nobel laureate in literature, Rabindranath Tagore, I assure my colleagues that nothing is insurmountable. What is required to be done is to work hard to make oneself visible; it cannot be achieved by writing long emails to the highest authorities of the countries, but to spend that time in productive research. We need to get patients, we need to prepare our students for being employable which will not only Visva-Bharati globally visible but also make us proud for being helpful in reaching such an exalted height by being trained in this great institution.

One has reasons to rejoice a bit because when many universities have lost their earlier rankings and slipped down to much lower ranks, Visva-Bharati has gone up by one rank with more points than what it obtained in 2022. This is not a great achievement, I admit. Nonetheless, it is indicative of an upward trend. We know where we are lacking and by addressing the weaknesses as a collective, we will surely improve our ranking in no time. What we need is a mindset without rancour and enmity. Those in administration, including the Vice Chancellor are not here to trouble those who are associated with this great seat of learning; they are here as facilitators. There should be a collective clamour that this is our university and it is our duty to save the campus due to politicization. A Vice Chancellor is appointed for a term of five years and if he is forced to be engaged in fire fighting for most of his productive time, who will be the losers is too obvious to need elaboration. There are so many universities in the country. If one makes a survey of the role of the faculty members and other stakeholders in defaming university on the basis of stories published or publicized through visual media, our university will have the first rank because there are many who enjoy in doing this harakiri. This also affects ranking because there is a column of public perception for which points are awarded. Given the negative publicity of Visva-Bharati by our colleagues and other stakeholders, it does not exaggerate to suggest that we cut the branches of the same tree which gives us shade during our rainy days.

The above text is not, at all, directed to absolve the administration of its share of degradation. The Vice Chancellor is just a cog in the machine, called Visva-Bharati which is also known for wrong reasons: here the Tagore's Nobel medal is stolen; Vice Chancellors were either incarcerated or dismissed due to serious charges of violating the core conduct of conduct; students were implicated because they submitted false marksheets; a teacher continued to teach a student for nearly five years who lacked the basic qualifications, many teachers are still in the radar of the Ministry of Education as they were appointed without fulfilling the eligibility criteria. Does it mean that this is the end of the road for Visva-Bharati? Not at all. In view of the fact that it was founded by a great humanist, Gurudev Tagore and governed by illustrious Indians who made their mark in the academia by generating knowledge for humanity as a whole and it stood out by the quality of teachers and many learners who became globally reputed. This phase is one of temporary lull and Visva-Bharati will rise as phoenix sooner or later.

Let me end this section by Tagore's own words which he wrote in a letter to Mahatma Gandhi on 2 February, 1940. The bard defined Visva-Bharati as the cargo of the vessel that carries his treasure of life. He requested Gandhiji to safeguard this cargo. He also hoped that his countrymen would realize the importance of keeping the cargo intact also to advance the available knowledge by drawing on what the cargo contained. Gandhiji in his reply on 19 February, 1940 assured his help although he was not sure whether he was well-equipped to undertake this feat. Nonetheless, he, by requesting the first premier of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, to make it an Institution of National Importance in 1951 which was accordingly made. We are carrying a rich legacy. Our responsibility is now to avoid mudslinging or washing dirty linens in

public but to get involved in constructive works for making Visva-Bharati the most sought after university in the world. This is possible, in other words, by upholding the core values of humanity - care, concern, compassion and empathy - which Gurudev espoused throughout his creative career in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

University is a collective venture encouraging measures to take it forward for fulfilling its primary goals of generation and dissemination of knowledge. Since universities represent an effort being undertaken by many, they also develop a design for collectivisation or togetherness which means that by being involved in a venture, many with different socio-cultural views work together for identical objectives. This is the fundamental principle. In practice, this is however not the case unfortunately. Gurudev Tagore confronted adverse circumstances while being engaged in building Visva-Bharati; he was abused, hurt and humiliated by many of his associates, presumably they failed to attain their personalized aims. Many of his creative texts bear testimony to this. His only son, Rathindranath Tagore was not spared when he was nominated by the Chancellor, India's Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. Being unable to complete his term of five years, he left the campus with tears as we now know. Many Vice Chancellors who followed him faced the same fate. There are Vice Chancellors who admitted how a majority of miscreants joined hands with one another for destroying this great institution. One of the former Vice Chancellors told me that he was shocked when he was abused by chosen expletives by the faculty members, members of the non-teaching staff, students and also so-called Ashramites. He is no more and unfortunately he just started to write about his experience of being Visva-Bharati's Vice Chancellor and his worldly existence was suddenly stopped. Out of my experience, I have identified why those who claim that they are for Visva-Bharati are annoyed or upset with the Vice Chancellor and his/her team. Fundamental to their wrath is their inability to make unlawful gain. If the Vice Chancellor succumbs to their whimsical demands which are mainly in the nature of illegal expectations, s/he will have no problem so long as s/he holds the office. But, as soon his/her term comes to an end, s/he is subject to harassment as s/he violated rules and regulations to buy peace. Now, a former Vice Chancellor is going to pay the price soon if the highest authority implicates him on the basis of a CBI enquiry. As the situation now, he was interrogated by the CBI and the charges were established. No exception was made when I joined the hot seat of power at Visva-Bharati. After my honeymoon period was over which lasted only for six months (although for others, it was, I am told, for three years), the detractors started taking out their fangs; it was, for obvious reasons, most disturbing but Gandhi's message that one should stand against the miscreants gave me courage and he became a core source of my indomitable spirit: no surrender to these pseudo Tagore bhakt. By being respectful to the university statutes and laws of the land, it was impossible for me to accept their demands which are couched in a language of seeking to satisfy ILLEGAL DESIRES. of one group or the other. Then, I realized why my teacher told me that Bidyut, Visva-Bharati is a troubled water. In view of my samskaras, unflinching determination and my unconditional faith in the views and deeds of the Mahatma when he fought colonial hegemony and prevalent socio-cultural

prejudices, I prepared myself to withstand the stone throwing affecting me adversely both mentally and physically. The outcome was known to me. These miscreants raised the demands that the Vice Chancellor should step down or he should be dismissed as their many email communications (which they publicized in the SUN(published in Britain) type tabloids making money by resorting to yellow journalism) demonstrate. But, I am about to finish my term of five years. Now, their demand is different and the future will show whether they will succeed in achieving their nefarious objectives.

My purpose is not to express my resentment but to create an atmosphere of bonhomie in the campus regardless of differences of opinion since those who survive on pecuniary benefits from Visva-Bharati nurture the same goal. Now, our institution is the only WORLD HERITAGE ACADEMIC CENTRE (although the official announcement is yet to be made) as per UNESCO, we have to redesign our mode of behaviour and interaction with one another. It is true that getting this tag was not possible by one's deeds; many contributed to this great achievement. We owe a great deal to them who enunciated the idea. We also acknowledge those in the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Education and, of course, the PMO have helped us. I put on record my gratitude and the entire Visva-Bharati Parivar to our hon'ble Chancellor, Shri Narendra Modi for his sustained guidance to us to take this cargo of Tagore's innovative universalist thinking forward. The tag of World Heritage University would have remained elusive had he not taken personal initiative along with his cabinet colleagues in the ministry of education, culture and other ministries. Now, we need to work hard to retain this for which we need to evolve a mindset which is immune from rancour. We need to remind ourselves that we belong to one Parivar where differences of views should not be allowed to be disproportionately devastating. We need to keep our differences within the family as is the case in most of our universities, including, JNU, DU, BHU, among others. We should also learn that the habit of washing dirty linens is always counterproductive, as history has shown. I am not sermonizing. Being one of the oldest members of the Parivar, whatever I have said so far is based on my experiences that I have had by being exposed to the functioning of many academic institutions in India and abroad since I began my doctoral studies at the London School of Economics in the early 1980s.

I am now convinced that one of critical factors for the decline of Indian universities is excessive politicization and those who are associated with them either help the unwanted elements to strike roots in the campus or remain indifferent. The members of the Parivar need to be proactive and nip the danger at the bud. It is true that the consequences are disastrous as I experienced during my term. I was put in captivity by those miscreants in the garb of students and teachers and no one seemed to have bothered. We need to find a mechanism to break the log jam. We should not allow this idea to determine our activities; and should not feel that if the demands remain unfulfilled, those who raise them are defeated. We will sort this out by intensive dialogue across the table since our goal is identical. But, we should also remember that just like a medical practitioner, who charges high doses of antibiotics to make body fight the bacteria effectively,



the university authority is to be accepted to purge the campus of miscreants, be it teachers, students, members of non-teaching staff or the so-called self-propagated moral custodians of Gurudev Tagore's legacy. Visva-Bharati should be allowed to be an institution which is usually described as a space translating into practice of KG TO PG where learners begin by getting admitted in Ananda/Mrinalini (in Santiniketan) and Santosh Pathsala (Sriniketan) end up with getting P(ENSION) and G(RATUITY) which means that they also get absorbed once they finish their formal training in Visva-Bharati. This is a bad practice which is required to be immediately rescinded. The process has begun in regard to recruitment to teaching positions. By accepting the National Testing Agency (NTA), for recruiting non-teaching staff, we hope to break this KG to PG nexus. With the introduction of Common Entrance Test for students for taking students in various courses, the texture of Visva-Bharati's student community has undergone a sea-change although the system of reservation for Visva-Bharati's own students is retained. In view of the fact that many universities accepting common entrance test for admitting students have done away with this rather partisan mechanism, Visva-Bharati needs to review the decision in near future. The system introduced by the Government of India is meant to create Visva-Bharati as Visva-Bharati rather than a typical regional university. Now, with the Global Heritage tag, we will surely attract students, teachers from all over the world. Perhaps, with this tag, we will be able to do justice to the heart-felt desires of Visva-Bharati's founder, Gurudev Tagore who never sacrificed his belief in universal humanism and by generating and disseminating knowledge appreciative of this vision, he had also shown us the path. Visva-Bharati is a roadmap for the future; it is a blueprint of how Visva-Bharati should be in future. To follow his model may appear to be insurmountable although nothing is impossible because if there is a will, there is a way.

I understand that this is a battle between uneven forces especially in West Bengal where Visva-Bharati is located. The sources of trouble are manifold. Prominent among them is the visible enmity between the Union Government and the State Government primarily due to politico-ideological differences between the political parties wielding power. Being a central university, it is governed by the Union Ministry of Education. This is enough for those controlling the state government to dub Visva-Bharati's Vice Chancellor as the stooge of the Union Government since, as per Visva-Bharati's Act and Statutes, the Vice Chancellor shall be appointed by the Ministry of Education of the Union Government. So, the state government has justifiable reason to believe that the Vice Chancellor will act as per Delhi's directions. This is far from true if one analyzes my tenure as Vice Chancellor because I cannot vouch for other incumbents. If that is believed to be true, we have reasons to believe that the state-controlled Universities have Vice Chancellors who owe their position by being unconditionally loyal to the ruling party with ideological preferences contrary to those of the party in power. I wonder whether one has adequate data to prove the contention. A Vice Chancellor is appointed to act as an academic-cum-administrative leader. His/her primary interest is to create a space for generating and disseminating knowledge. It is also true that this does not always happen and many individuals

were selected in the past who ruined the university by vitiating the milieu which help create suspicion and the desire for fulfilling partisan goals by hook or crook. One way out is dialogue with those nurturing objectives for keeping the university in its track; the other, rather unpleasant, option is to charge high doses of corrective medication.

### **An allegory**

Let me end this missive with an allegory. There are many pretentious well-wishers of Visva-Bharati, who appear to satisfy their unattained goals by being abusive to the Vice Chancellor and his/her compatriots with the mission complementary to Visva-Bharati's academic excellence. In view of Visva-Bharati's decline in the NIRF ranking, these self-proclaimed custodians appeared to have awakened from their deep slumber. So, now, they indulge in activities to prove what they want to demonstrate to the rest of the world as their genuine feeling for this proverbial goose that lays golden eggs because for them Visva-Bharati is like that.

Now, the story unfolds. There are five major characters: Kalluram Ghawra, Bishruto Kabra, Ghagu Kuprioyo, Aalibholi Kenaram and the Sardar. The location is Saiyalopur. As soon as the announcement that Sardar is likely to gain, the rest of the four characters join hands since they felt that how can it be possible for the Sardar to have the Grinding Mill. Their objections are based first on their jealousy because they lost their space with the arrival of the Sardar on the scene. And, secondly, they also apprehended since the inhabitants of Saiyalopur would often come to the Mill for grinding millets which would bring the Sardar in close contact with the people at large. This, they saw, as threatening. Hence, they now sit together to hatch a conspiracy to create a design to permanently damage the possibility of coming together with Sardar and the people. Kalluram Ghawra started the dialogue by saying that they should undertake steps to stop this; if necessary, he also talked about applying coercive force. He was encouraged to explore this possibility because in this conspiracy, the of three of his co-conspirators, Bishruto is notoriously famous for deploying means to liquidate whom he considers as enemies. He is also the local chieftain who gathers around him many operators who are mentally tuned to adopt any means just to please their God-father who provides them with sources for fulfilling their partisan interests. He is the one who can easily cement a bond among the people with contrasting opinions since he has money power and also muscle power. His mode of operation is well-defined: develop a collective by distributing spoils for support and if that does not work, apply force. The local king is scared of him too because he is the main source of money for the royal coffer and also the supplier of forces capable of fulfilling the desire of the king and the king anointed prince. So, he is very useful for the attainment of any aim; he does it in exchange of a guarantee that he will remain the uncrowned king in his area and the king's law-enforcement agency are at his beck and call. This is a great help to him and he thus becomes the de facto ruler of the area under his control.

They came together because the Sardar is their principal enemy and they are determined to size him up since he is a deterrent to the attainment of their selfish aims. Now, the control of the goose by the Sardar is an irritant for he solely has access to the golden eggs which, for obvious reasons, was a source of disappointment for all. How to regain control over the goose was now their main concern. For Kalluram Gahwra, the job was easy because he is in the habit of shifting allegiance too often if that serves his interests. He is a habitual DAL-BADLU. He thus did not think at all to accept Bishruto as his leader although in the past he left his group since he was no longer profitable to him. Ghagu Kuprioyo is too old to be left alone. So, he happily accepted Bishruto who will ensure gain for him although he squeezed the goose in the past to gain what he never thought in his life. He did everything possible for his personal gain, both cash and kind. He immediately join the Nexus with the same goal as his compatriots. Aalibholi cannot be left behind because he was pushed out of the farm where the goose was protected because he also wanted to establish his hegemony over the innocent goose. Once they formalized their unity, they informed the king who immediately sent all possible help by liberally giving both pecuniary help and also a strong force with maximum striking capabilities.

This was going to be a battle of uneven forces, they guessed, forgetting that the Sardar had behind him the villagers from villages around the farm. The four being united for personal gains never gauged how it was possible for the Sardar to collect so many people when he had nothing to offer them. It caught them by surprise. The Sardar was confident because the goose was God's gift for the people; so it was the duty of those who joined the Sardar because they also had the same concern. So, despite the fact, Sardar had nothing to do, the villagers joined because, for them, the goose belonged to society, and hence it should not be allowed to shift hands. Bishruto had support of the king; so, he was confident of the support of Security Personnel when he needed them. He succeeded in this regard because the entire polton was deputed for him by the king who now became certain of his victory over Sardar who, they wrongly conceived, had no force to bank upon which would make their task easy.

The date of the battle was fixed; both the parties prepared to the hilt, it appeared. Sardar was hardly bothered because he knew that truthfulness and honesty were far more stronger than being deceitful. Even before a first was hurled, Bishruto was put behind the bar by the Emperor; Gaghu Kuprioyo was hounded by the people of his mohalla as a traitor; Kalluram Ghawra started vilification campaign by flexing muscle in the air given the fact that he is a proven Mirzafhar or betrayer. And, Aalibholi, the most untrustworthy individual had no alternative but to shed crocodile tears. She was spared of attack by the villagers because she disappeared from the scene.

Sardar proved again that "one cannot befool the entire community again and again". The providential authority stands by those who are ready to give up everything for the communal cause. One get deceived by the immediate success of the wrongdoers; but, that is absolutely

temporary because in the highest court of justice presided over by the Almighty, justice prevails. Bishruto and his equally misguided perpetrators were shown the door; nobody knows when he will be free; Kalluram appears like a fish that comes out of water for inhaling oxygen for survival; nobody knows the whereabouts of Aalibholi; Ghagu Kuprioyo has understood that his days are over and nobody's genealogy can never remain a shield for hiding his I'll motives.

This is the end of the story and Sardar remains unscathed this time although, to many, the conspiracy appears to have taken alarming proportions. Sardar thus remains the Sardar despite attempts regularly made by those who are hellbent to harm him notwithstanding being defeated by forces that emerge from nowhere and all of a sudden.

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01 July, 2023

### একটি রূপক-কাহিনি

আমি এই বার্তালাপটি শেষ করব একটি রূপক-কাহিনি শুনিয়ে। বিশ্বভারতীতে এরকম অনেক ভণ্ড হিতাকাঙ্ক্ষী আছে যারা তাদের অচরিতার্থ স্বার্থ হাসিল করতে উপাচার্য এবং স্বদেশবাসীর অবমাননা করে, এবং পরিণামে বিশ্বভারতীর বিদ্যাচর্চার উৎকর্ষকেও জলাঞ্জলি দিতে কসুর করে না। এন.আই.আর.এফ র্‌যাংকিঙে বিশ্বভারতীর অধঃপতনের খবরে এইসব স্বঘোষিত অভিভাবকেরা হঠাৎ তন্দ্রা কাটিয়ে গা-ঝাড়া দিয়ে ওঠে। অতএব এখন তারা নানারকম ছলে দুনিয়ার মানুষকে বোঝাতে চাইবে যে বিশ্বভারতী নামক সোনার ডিমপাড়া সেই লোককথার রাজহাঁসটার জন্য তাদের দরদ কতই না নির্ভেজাল!

এখন গল্পটা খুলে বলা যাক। এই গল্পে পাঁচটি মুখ্য চরিত্র আছে। তাদের নাম কাল্লুরাম ঘাওরা, বিশ্রুত কাবরা, ঘাণ্ডু কুপ্রিয়, আলিভোলি কেনারাম এবং সর্দার। জায়গাটার নাম সাইয়ালোপুর। সেখানে যখনই শোনা যেত সর্দারের কিছু প্রাপ্তি ঘটতে চলেছে, অমনি বাকি চারজন পরস্পর হাত মেলাত, কারণ তারা ভাবত কেন শুধু সর্দারের হাতেই ক্ষমতার 'ঘানিকল'-টা থাকবে! তাদের আপত্তির কারণ মূলত ঈর্ষাপ্রসূত, কারণ দৃশ্যপটে সর্দারের আগমনের পর থেকেই তারা তাদের পায়ের তলার মাটি হারাচ্ছিল। দ্বিতীয়ত, তারা এও বুঝতে পারছিল, সাইয়ালোপুরের লোকেরা দানাপানির খোঁজে ঘানিকলের কাছে এলে সর্দারের সঙ্গে তাদের নিয়মিত যোগাযোগ গড়ে উঠবে, এবং সে বেশ আশঙ্কার ব্যাপার হবে! এইজন্য তারা মতলব ভাঁজতে শুরু করল যাতে সর্দারের কাছে জনগণের আসার পথটা বন্ধ করা যায়। কাল্লুরাম ঘাওরা কথা শুরু করল এই বলে যে যে-করেই হোক এটা আটকাতে হবে। যদি প্রয়োজন হয় সে তার জন্য জবরদস্তিমূলক পদক্ষেপ করতেও পিছপা হবে না। সে এরকম কথা বেশ উৎসাহের সঙ্গেই বলতে পারল কারণ তার অন্য তিন সহযোগীর মধ্যে বিশ্রুত কাবরা শত্রুদের নিকেশ করার মতো খতরনাক কাজে বেশ কুখ্যাত ছিল। সে ছিল আবার এলাকার মোড়ল। বহুলোক তাদের এই 'গডফাদার'-কে খুশি করে স্বার্থ

হাসিল করার জন্য মানসিকভাবে তৈরিই থাকত। অর্থশক্তি আর পেশিশক্তির দাপটে সে খুব সহজেই বিরোধী জনমত চাপা দিয়ে দিতে পারত। তার কাজের ধরন খুব পরিষ্কার। সমর্থন আদায়ের জন্য একদঙ্গল মানুষের মধ্যে এটা-ওটা ছড়িয়ে দাও, তাতেও কাজ না হলে পেশিশক্তি প্রয়োগ করো। স্থানীয় রাজা পর্যন্ত তাকে সমঝে চলত কারণ বিশ্রুতই ছিল রাজকোষ ভরে দেওয়ার প্রধান নির্ভরস্থল, এবং রাজা ও অভিষিক্ত রাজপুত্রের আশ মেটানোর জন্য সৈন্য-সামন্তের প্রধান জোগানদার। সুতরাং সে যা-খুশি করতে চায় করতে পার! মুকুটহীন রাজার মতো এলাকার রাজপেয়াদাদের সে আজ্ঞাবহ দাসে পরিণত করে ফেলল। এই সুবিধা নিয়ে সে বকলমে এলাকার নিয়ন্ত্রণও কয়েম করে নিল।

চারমূর্তি একজোট হল কারণ সর্দার হল তাদের মূল শত্রু। তারা তাকে শিক্ষা দিতে দৃঢ়সংকল্প হল, কারণ তাদের স্বার্থসিদ্ধির পথের কাঁটা হল ওই সর্দার। এখন রাজহংসীটির নিয়ন্ত্রণ গেছে সর্দারের হাতে; যা বিশ্রুতর কাছে বেশ মাথব্যথারই কারণ। এতদিন সোনার ডিমের নাগাল ছিল একমাত্র তারই হাতে। ওই চারজনের কাছে এটা বেশ দুশ্চিন্তা ও উদ্বেগের কারণ হল। কী করে আবার রাজহংসীটির উপর নিয়ন্ত্রণ কয়েম করা যায়, এইটা হল সবার চিন্তার বিষয়। কালুরাম ঘাওয়ার কাছে অবশ্য ব্যাপারটা সহজ, কারণ সুবিধা বুঝে শিবির বদল করায় সে ছিল ওস্তাদ। সে ছিল একটা পাক্লা 'দলবদল'। সুতরাং বিশ্রুতকে তার নেতা বলে মেনে নিতে তাকে দুবার ভাবতে হল না; যদিও আগে লাভজনক হবে না ভেবে সে তার শিবির ছেড়ে চলে গিয়েছিল। ঘাণ্ড কুপ্রিয় বড় বড়ো। একা একা সে কিছুই করতে পারবে না। সুতরাং নিজের স্বার্থের কথা ভেবে সেও সানন্দে বিশ্রুতর দলে গেল ভিড়ে। অবশ্য আগে সে রাজহংসীটি থেকে যথেষ্টই কামিয়ে নিয়েছে, যা ছিল তার জীবনে প্রত্যাশারও বেশি। নিজের ধান্দার জন্য সে সব করতে পারত, তা টাকা-পয়সার বিনিময়েই হোক বা অন্য কোনও দাক্ষিণ্যে। ঘাণ্ড কুপ্রিয় তৎক্ষণাৎ তার সহযোগীদের মতো দিব্যি ঢুকে গেল ওই চক্রে। আলিভোলিকে ছেড়ে দেওয়া যায় না। তাকে বের করে দেওয়া হয়েছিল রাজহাঁসের খামার থেকে, যেখানে সযত্নে হাঁসটিকে প্রতিপালন করা হচ্ছিল। তাকে বের করে দিতে হয়েছিল, কারণ সে ওই বেচারি রাজহাঁসটির উপর বেদম খবরদারি চালাচ্ছিল। যখন তাদের জোটঘোঁট বেশ পাকাপোক্ত হয়ে উঠেছে, তখন তারা খবর পাঠাল রাজার কাছে। শোনামাত্র রাজা মুক্তহস্তে আর্থিক দানে ও সৈন্যসামন্ত পাঠিয়ে সম্ভাব্য সবরকমভাবে সাহায্য উজাড় করে দিল তাদের জন্য।

তারা ধরেই নিয়েছিল এটা একটা অসম লড়াই হবে। কিন্তু তার ভুলে গিয়েছিল, সর্দারের পিছনে আছে রাজহংসীটির খামারের চারদিকে থাকা সাধারণ মানুষজন। ব্যক্তিগত স্বার্থে মগ্ন ওই চারজন বুঝতেই পারেনি যে সর্দার কী করে এত মানুষকে তার দিকে টেনে নেবে; যেখানে তার কাছ থেকে কোনও কিছু পাওয়ার সম্ভাবনা নেই! তারা খুব আশ্চর্য হল। সর্দারের মনে কিন্তু বিশ্বাস ছিল যে, যেহেতু রাজহংসীটি সাধারণ মানুষের কাছে ঈশ্বরের আশীর্বাদের তুল্য, সুতরাং কর্তব্যের খাতিরেই তাকে রক্ষা করার জন্য সর্দার সাধারণ মানুষকে কাছে পাবেই। সাধারণ মানুষও ওই রাজহংসীটি নিয়ে একইরকম উদ্ভিগ্ন ছিল। তো ব্যাপারটা ঘটল কী— সর্দারকে কিছুই করতে হল না। সাধারণ গ্রামবাসীরাই এসে জড়ো হল সর্দারের পাশে, কেননা হাঁসটা ছিল সাধারণের সম্পত্তি; এবং তারা বুঝেছিল সেটি কোনওভাবেই বেহাত হওয়া কাম্য নয়। বিশ্রুতর মাথার উপর ছিল রাজার আশীর্বাদী হাত। সে জানত, চাইলেই সে ইচ্ছামতো সিপাই-বরকন্দাজ পেয়ে যাবে। এ-ব্যাপারে তাকে সফলই বলতে হয়, কারণ রাজার যত পল্টন ছিল সবই তার জন্য নিয়োজিত হল। সে ধরেই নিল সৈন্য-সামন্তহীন সর্দারকে কুপোকাত করা তো বাঁ-হাতের খেলা! কিন্তু তাদের অনুমান ছিল ভুল।

যুদ্ধের দিনক্ষণ হল স্থির। উভয়পক্ষ সশস্ত্র সজ্জিত হল। সর্দার কিন্তু অবিচলিত। কারণ সে জানে সত্যবাদিতা এবং সততার শক্তি অপশক্তির চেয়ে সবসময় শক্তিশালী। প্রথম অস্ত্রটি ছোড়ার আগেই

বিশ্রুতকে সম্মাট পাঠালেন কাৰাগারে। ঘাণ্ড কুপ্ৰিয়কে বিশ্বাসঘাতক বলে ছেঁকে ধরল তার মহল্লার লোকজনেরাই। কাল্লুরাম ঘাওরা পেশি ফুলিয়ে ফাঁকা আস্থালন করে যা-তা বলতে থাকল, কাৰণ লোকে তাকে 'মীরজাফর' বলে ঠিকই চিনে নিয়েছিল। আর আলিভোলি, সবচেয়ে অবিশ্বস্ত সেই লোকটার কুস্তীরাস্ত্র বিসর্জন করা ছাড়া আর কিছু করার ছিল না। সে সরাসরি গ্রামবাসীদের হাতে আক্রান্ত হওয়া থেকে বেঁচে গেল; যেহেতু ঘটনাস্থল থেকে সে আগেই চম্পট দিয়েছিল।

সর্দার আবার প্রমাণ করল, 'সমগ্র জনসমাজকে বোকা বানিয়ে কেউ দিনের পর দিন পার পেয়ে যেতে পারে না।' বিধাতার আশীর্বাদে শেষ পুরস্কার তারাই পায় যারা সমাজের স্বার্থে, সাধারণের স্বার্থে সর্বস্ব ত্যাগ করতে জানে। খারাপ কাজ করেও কেউ সাময়িক সফলতা পেতে পারে, কিন্তু তা নিতান্তই সাময়িক। বিধাতার বিচারশালার চূড়ান্ত বিচারে শেষপর্যন্ত প্রতিষ্ঠা পায় শুধু ন্যায়। বিশ্রুত এবং তার মতো নীতি-বিচ্যুত অপরাধীদের কাৰাগারের ওপারে যেতে হয়। কেউ জানে না কবে তারা খালাস পাবে। কাল্লুরামের এখন ডাঙায় তোলা মাছের দশা হয়েছে। আলিভোলি কোথায় গিয়ে গা ঢাকা দিয়েছে কেউ জানে না। ঘাণ্ড কুপ্ৰিয় বুঝে গেছে, তার দিন শেষ হয়ে এসেছে। এখন সে এও বুঝতে পারছে, কৌলীন্যের আড়ালে নিজের উদ্দেশ্য চরিতার্থ করার সুদিন চিরকাল চলে না।

গল্প এখানেই শেষ, এবং অনেকবার ষড়যন্ত্র করার পরও সর্দারের গায়ে এখনও আঁচড়াটি লাগেনি। বারবার আচস্থিতে তার অনিষ্ট করার চেষ্টা সত্ত্বেও সর্দার সর্দারই থেকে যায়।

প্রফেসর বিদ্যুৎ চক্রবর্তী

উপাচার্য

বিশ্বভারতী, শান্তিনিকেতন

০১ জুলাই, ২০২৩

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