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श्री नरेंद्र मोदी

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# 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

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My Eighth Missive

8 August, 2020

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

### **The Idea of Visva-Bharati**

In my existence at Visva-Bharati for close to two years, the most difficult issue that appears to have been most bothersome to me is the idea of Visva Bharati. What is it? Is this just a seat of learning for distribution of degrees after fulfilling certain statutory requirements? Is this also about an urge for creating an environment in which learning is not imposed but evolves naturally? Is this a place for squeezing as much as one can to ensure one's selfish gain? Is this a place where the expression, Rabindrik, is resorted to by everybody regardless of whether this is in consonance with what Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore stood for? Is this a place where one learns the art of being together for a humanitarian mission. Questions can be multiplied since Visva-Bharati has dwindled in its importance for decades for which those associated with the running of the University and also those who shared the golden egg that the proverbial goose continues to lay. There were, of course, attempts to halt the downfall though the effort did not seem to have been powerful enough to scuttle the evil designs of those who were determined to keep the administrators in tenterhooks to avoid being harmful. As a result, Visva-Bharati suffered terribly: sometime, because of unlawful appointments, the Vice Chancellor was arrested; because of bypassing the rules for appointment, those who were selected have been asked to undergo scrutiny again; because of the negligence, Visva-Bharati's prime land was



taken away for private gain. Despite being sources of all-round gains for everybody, Visva-Bharati remained an orphan child. Most of us had fun at Visva-Bharati's cost; a large contingent enjoyed being identified as Rabindriks with hardly any substance in its claim. It is most paradoxical that a heritage campus, Visva-Bharati, instead of being a centre of excellence, is being reduced to a refugee for elements that thrive by undertaking what is exactly contrary to the ideals that Gurudev had fought for throughout his life. It is a matter of common knowledge that Gurudev was not only a *marg-darshak* (pathfinder) but also one who devoted his life to radically alter the prevalent socio-economic reality, largely vitiated by deliberately nurtured socio-political prejudices sustaining divisions in society.

A social reformer, the bard had left no stone unturned to accomplish what he felt was most appropriate for self-sustaining human existence in circumstances which were not exactly in his favour in colonial India. By being pragmatic, the poet also evolved mechanism for development which easily attracted people from the villages around Visva-Bharati. His ideas were conceptualized in his 1904 *Swadeshi Samaj* which drew on his heart-felt desire to make Indian villages self-sufficient. A careful reading of the text reveals that in many ways the model had an uncanny similarity with Henry Maine's *Village Communities in the East and West* (1871) in which the author appreciated the so-called village republics of the East which were self-sustaining in terms of basic needs and necessities. Tagore's literary texts are illustrative of many instances of how the bard conveyed the ideas in more lucid manner. For instance, Nikhilesh in *Ghare Baire* (1916) epitomizes an endeavour to actually develop indigenous industries for producing goods which we require for daily use, like soap, candle etc. Similarly, Sohini in his short story *Laboratory* articulates a design to be independent in scientific research and generation of knowledge in its support. These examples are cited just to show that Gurudev was not just a historical but a civilizational figure who clearly charted a course of action and appropriate designs to take India forward even in circumstances when we were mentally plagued to think independent of the derivative colonial discourse. What is required to be emphasized here is that despite being exposed to the Enlightenment values at an early age of his life, he was equally emphatic to learn from India's ancient texts presumably because of his father, Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, who, along with colleagues in Brahma Samaj, endeavoured hard to bring back India's lost intellectual traditions which were equally rich and sophisticated sources of knowledge. It was a revelation for Maharshi and his compatriots which they translated by forming Brahma Samaj that drew on Upanishadic texts to evolve a new discourse of human existence. Being emotionally very close to his father, Gurudev developed



a new school of thought on the basis of what he learnt from him. Santiniketan flourished into Visva Bharati which was not merely a university but a place articulating the thought, *Yatra Vishwan Bhawatveka Needam* (the whole world is a bird's cage with all its diversity). Visva-Bharati is thus an idea; a mode of conceptualizing human existence; a design for accommodating socio-culturally diverse set of human beings.

### **Why this long preamble to this missive?**

Visva-Bharati is rapidly going downhill. The pace of deterioration may have been unexpected though what is most exciting is the endeavour of a majority of those associated with the University to collectively work together for bringing back its earlier glory. In my existence in the campus close to two years, I can vouch that I have experienced the collectively zeal for its improvement, not merely as a centre for generation and dissemination of knowledge, but also a model of collective human existence drawing on one another for common benefits. Visva-Bharati thus reinforces the dictum of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the world is one family). A perusal of Visva-Bharati's history since its inception reveals that Gurudev took ample care in organizing Ashram life in terms of this spirit which was manifested in forms which brought the Ashramites together regardless of class, creed and colour. Gurudev's purpose was to transform oneself rather than expecting others to change, just like Ghalib's conceptualization which he articulated by saying that '*Umar Bhar Ghalib yehi gunah karta raha, dhool chehre pe the, aur aaina saaf karta raha*' (all his life Ghalib made this one mistake – it was his face that was dirty, but what he kept cleaning was the mirror).

So, this missive is a call for contemplation. Let us look at our own resources which are useful in augmenting Visva-Bharati's standing as a centre for higher learning. In some respects, the University is unique, the parallel of which is not so easily available. Visva-Bharati stands out for schools of Music, Arts and Aesthetics which attract students from all over the world. Not only are these schools international in its student-composition, it is also equally global in terms of teaching faculties. Our graduates are everywhere sought after since they receive trainings which are exclusive in character. Furthermore, the Palli Siksha Bhavan and Palli Samgathana Vibhaga (Institute of Rural Reconstruction) in Sriniketan contain departments which are a creative blending of theory and practice of rural reconstruction. These departments represent Tagore's initiatives in spreading education among the rural masses and also equip them with skills for earning their livelihoods. Silpa Sadan is, for instance, a specialized centre for rural craft, technology and design. As the course-curriculum is also practice-driven, graduates from



these departments are trained both in theory of rural reconstruction and its realization through various deeds and designs.

Santiniketan also houses Bhasa Bhavana (School of Languages), Vidya Bhavana (School of Humanities and Social Sciences), Siksha Bhavana (School of Sciences) which are distinctly known for their contribution in the creation and dissemination of knowledge in the respective fields. Some of the faculties are good in their own right though collectively they hardly express the potentials that they all have. This is a tragedy, perhaps in all Indian universities; more so, in Visva-Bharati where some of the faculties are divided largely because of personal differences which neither ideological nor based on intellectual preferences for models of socio-economic models of development and change. It is also a matter of sadness that the personal differences sometimes reached a stage when the Vice Chancellor or higher officers needed to intervene to bring back normalcy in the department. Vinay Bhavana (School of Education) is another important centre that stands out in its right though it is painful to state that our colleagues' full potentials remain under-utilized, if not un-utilized for reasons which are neither due to lack of infrastructure nor due to any other factors except perhaps our failure to develop bonhomie among the colleagues. Hopefully, the situation will improve with the realization that united we flourish and divided we ruin.

There are many Bhavans which also form the nucleus of Visva-Bharati. Instead of dealing with the contribution of each and every Bhavan, suffice it to say here that prominent among them is certainly Rabindra Bhavan which has all the houses where Gurudev lived during his stay at Santiniketan and also the museum with artefacts associated with his life and also his paintings and manuscripts of many of the literary creations which made him transcendental in appeal. For those who descend on Santiniketan, visit to Rabindra Bhavan is a pilgrimage and for the University, arrival of tourists is a source of sustained income. Besides, Rabindra Bhavan, there is Bangladesh Bhavan which, apart from being marvellous for its architectural beauty, epitomizes an endeavour towards building and consolidating politico-cultural bonhomie between India and Bangladesh. Gurudev Tagore is the cultural bridge since he not only evolved a rich legacy for the Bengalis on both sides of the border but also gave the national anthem to these two great nations. With support from Bangladesh Government, complemented by Government India's aid, Bangladesh Bhavan is a strong step to buttress the relationship between these two countries which are socio-culturally connected with each other. This is nothing unusual as Visva-Bharati's history exemplifies: for example, the China Bhavan,



founded in 1937, the Nippon Bhavan, founded in 1954 (though the lessons for Japanese language had begun in 1905) were founded under the patronage of external benefactors.

As an academic hub, Visva-Bharati has reasons to be proud of besides having the great Rabindrik legacy. It is true that there are faculty members in various departments who do not seem to have contributed to their discipline to the extent it is expected. Nonetheless, there are many who stand out for being academically vibrant not only in terms of outputs but also qualities. I notice the building of a healthy environment in which the relatively young faculty members are being mentored by their senior counterparts. A perusal of the evolution of renowned universities across the world confirms that the root of success is the healthy interaction between the young and senior faculty members across departments. In two respects, it is a remarkable development: not only will it erase the difference between the faculty members it will also ensure interdisciplinary cooperation among them which is now pursued globally with great zeal.

Our libraries are a useful support system. Given its huge collection of book, the libraries are both digitized and also operate in the traditional mould. We hope to digitize the entire collection soon. Those who are involved in helping the readers locate the exact resources deserved to be acclaimed. Furthermore, I must appreciate the level of efficiency in which new books are procured. The journal section is rich and easily available on demand. This is admirable since our library staff are not only helpful in finding the what is being search by the readers but also assist them in getting the required sources though inter-library loan system. What is also noticeable is the holding of regular webinar in the library; I have had the opportunity to participate in a couple of webinar in the University library. I must compliment the library staff for organizing the webinar without glitches which does not seem improbable given the occasional absence of high-speed internet connectivity in the campus. At the behest of the UGC, the library has organized a webinar on Gandhiji's socio-political ideas with internal resources; it was highly appreciated by those who are known for their expertise on Gandhiana. In fact, this is the beginning of many other webinars on various aspects of Indian nationalist thought which did not appear to have received adequate analytical scrutiny due largely to the hegemonic grip of one dominant thematic design of conceptualization.

The idea of Santiniketan of being “dearer than everything else”, to quote the first sentence of our Ashram sangeet help generate an inner strength among those who are fortunate enough to be associated with the serene atmosphere in which Visva-Bharati has evolved as a Ashram by



dint of self-less hard work of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore and his compatriots who were equally inspired by his concern for humanity, especially those who were socio-economically marginalized due largely to created artificial hierarchy among human beings for partisan gains.

The aim of these series of Missives is not to hurl abuse to anybody but to reiterate the social, economic and ideological values and ideas that informed the collective endeavour which led to the foundation of Visva-Bharati in 1921. This is self-introspection for each of us who is keen to bring back the glory that Visva-Bharati had in recent past. One may have been disturbed by the unpleasant truth that these Missives have placed in the public domain those who are Rabindrik in the real sense of the terms seem to be unanimous in accepting the view that Visva-Bharati needs care to halt further deterioration. I am an easy target for anything that happens within the campus though it is a matter of common knowledge that Vice Chancellor is part of a team, the members of which are paid monthly salary to work for Visva-Bharati's smooth running in accordance with the well-established rules and regulations of the Government of India and also the 1951 Visva Bharati Acts and Statutes. I represent a team which is constituted by those in Visva-Bharati and also those in the MHRD and other concerned departments in both the Government of West Bengal and Government of India. The Missives are the outcome of my understanding of the situation in Visva-Bharati which is bad bit not redeemable provided we all embark on a mission mode for its well-being. The survival of Visva-Bharati is integral to our existence and we should pledge to protect it by being fully devoted to the socio-political aims that Gurudev had always privileged.

### **What is required to be done?**

I should not be misunderstood that whatever I shall be saying are axiomatic; they are merely suggestions on the basis of what I deem appropriate for Visva-Bharati's well-being: -

- 1) Let's work together for Visva-Bharati following Gurudev's idea of "*Aai Tobe Sahachari Hate Hat Dhari Dhari Nachibi Ghiri Ghiri Gahibi Gaan*" (Let's join hands to collectively enjoy life through songs and dance). Let's nurture feelings of being together for the institution that has been carrying with itself a great legacy, linked with its founder, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore.
- 2) Being a source of livelihood for those who earn monthly salary, their survival may not be so easy-going if Visva-Bharati is weakened. For those outside the campus, who also derive their livelihood, Visva-Bharati remains as useful as those who are in its payroll.



- 3) Visva-Bharati is not just a degree-disbursing authority; it is a way of life, an ideological mission that drew on Gurudev's life-long experiences of how to develop an inclusive society, bereft of discriminatory and also hierarchical divisions of human beings to ensure benefit of a miniscule minority at the cost of the hapless majority. Those who are proud to be Rabindrik have a moral duty to imbibe and also transmit the spirit that Gurudev had nurtured while being engaged in building Visva-Bharati as an alternative form of generation and dissemination of knowledge.
- 4) The object of these Missives is, under no circumstances, defensive. I strongly feel that attending Wednesday prayer at the Mandir is part and parcel of Visva-Bharati culture. Hence, I shall keep on insisting on this regardless of criticisms of those who talk about their rights by conveniently forgetting their duties to the University which is their source of livelihood. After having had sustained interactions with my colleagues here, I am also not sure how many of us continue to remain marketable on the basis of their academic inputs. Barring a few, a majority of us have preferred to concentrate only on teaching which is one of two aspects of University teaching; the other aspect is about one's research output. I am denying that we don't produce though a casual look at our Annual Report shows that not many of them shall stand the test of academic rigour that is usually accepted in serious academic exercises.
- 5) It is strange to me that the local businessmen express their heartfelt concerns and characterizes the University decision to do away with Poush Mela and Basanta Utsav as anti-Rabindrik though they hardly participate in any other events that take place in the campus to uphold the Rabindrik tradition. The reason is simple: Poush Mela is a source of income; so is Basanta Utsav. But, attending prayer in Wednesdays' Mandir or Baitaliks does not help them make money. Hence how can these events attract these hypocritical Rabindriks?
- 6) Using Gurudev and his legacy as a front for their money-minded schemes is a ploy that the local businessmen, in collusion with University insiders, have been using to great effect for years now. So far, there has been no administrative pushback against these fraudulent practices, perhaps because the members of the Visva-Bharati community lacked a sense of ownership. Thankfully, today's administration is putting in a concerted effort to stop these practices. However, this decidedly positive move has led to a number of unsavoury and uncalled-for consequences, which are both unfortunate and based on nefarious designs of those determined to fulfill their partisan interests. The University has the capacity to put them at bay.




7) Another thorn in Visva-Bharati's side is the existence of land sharks, a topic that I covered in detail in my Sixth Missive. The administration is working tirelessly as per the MHRD's instruction of 30 November, 2017 to wipe out the plague of illegal encroachment on Visva-Bharati land. Whenever the University has tried to do this in the past, it has never failed to provoke wild consternation among the beneficiaries of this well-entrenched nefarious practice. History appears to be repeating itself, as the current administration is facing similar abuse from said beneficiaries.

I end this Missive by reiterating the appeal to my colleagues, students and other stakeholders that let's work together amicably to restore the glory of Visva-Bharati that it has in recent past. We have inherited an institution with great legacy and now it is our moral responsibility to transfer the same to the posterity. What is thus required now is to join hands to repair the damages due to our failure (if not willful negligence) to remain committed to the values and ideals that Gurudev nurtured throughout his life.

As I said in my past Missives, in this tiring time, we must be protective of those who are victims of COVID-19, and, at the same time we must train ourselves to religiously follow the instructions to keep the invisible but devastatingly fatal virus at bay.

Keep the faith.

  
Bidyut Chakrabarty  
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