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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

FOUNDED BY  
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## My Final Missive

29 August, 2020

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

Visva-Bharati is soon going to be *Visva-Bharati* in the true sense of the term. Gurudev Tagore had been keen to spread the model that he had evolved in Santiniketan but this was not achieved, presumably because no serious effort was made earlier. What Tagore had in mind was articulated in the 1951 Visva-Bharati Act, in the formulation of which the first chancellor, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru (India's first Prime Minister) was reported to have played a critical role. Thus the 1951 Act, 6 (7) provision clearly stipulates that

‘the University shall have the power to establish, at any place in India campuses, special centres, specialized laboratories or other units for research and instruction as are, in the opinion of the University, necessary for the furtherance of its objects’.

With the personal keenness of the hon'ble Chancellor, Sri Narendra Modi (India's Prime Minister), it has now been possible to establish a satellite campus of Visva-Bharati at Ramgarh, Uttarakhand. The idea that was mooted by the hon'ble Chancellor was translated into reality by the hon'ble Minister of Education, Government of India, Sri Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank who remained the main pillar of strength at every stage for the preparation of the DPR (Detailed Project Report) for the project. Furthermore, the idea of having a second campus in Ramgarh is a particularly fitting tribute to the bard because it was here where Gurudev is reported to have evolved the main concern of his *Gitanjali* (offering of songs) which was referred to in his Nobel citation as the best out of all the texts that he produced. The additional fact that Tagore took his daughters there (especially



Renuka for the recuperation of her health) means that this hill town had a special place in his heart. The planning for *Gitanjali* aside, Gurudev also wrote some of his most famous songs while in Ramgarh, which cements the town's status as an important source of his intellectual inspiration. There, immersed in pristine nature, it was perhaps easier for the bard to build a dialectical connection with his surroundings. Ramgarh was a completely different landscape for Gurudev, given the fact that he spent most of his time in riverine east Bengal where his zamindari estate was located.

### **Rabindranath Tagore and Ramgarh**

Rabindranath Tagore was fond of going to the mountains. In his autobiography *Jiban Smriti*, he put down his childhood memories of exploring the Himalayas in the company of his father Maharshi Debendranath Tagore. In 1903, he visited Almora, staying at a rented house with his ailing daughter Renuka, in the hope of restoring her health in the pollution-free environment of the Himalayas. Tragically, a few months later she died of tuberculosis in Calcutta at the age of twelve.

Sometime in 1913, at the insistence of his son Rathindranath, Gurudev Tagore bought a villa with a huge garden for ten thousand rupees at Ramgarh, which was situated between Nainital and Almora. The garden included trees like apple, cherry, guava and peach, which led Gurudev to change the name of the house from 'Snow View Gardens' to '*Haimanti*'.

On his 53<sup>rd</sup> birthday on 8 May 1914, Tagore wrote to his colleague, William Pearson, "I am getting ready to go to Ramgarh next Sunday". Two days later, the Poet wrote to the English clergyman and friend C.F. Andrews, to invite him to Ramgarh during the summer vacation by stating that

"When are you coming to stay with me in the Hills? I am afraid you are passing through a great deal of worry, and you are in need of good rest. I won't let you work during this vacation. We must not have any particular plans for our holidays. Let us agree to waste them utterly, until laziness proves to be a burden to us".

The poet started for Ramgarh on the same day with his daughter in law Pratima, son in law Nagendranath, daughter Meera and two domestic helpers. Gurudev Tagore instantly liked Ramgarh, despite the hazardous journey to reach the destination. At that time the sixteen-mile-road from Kathdodam to Ramgarh was not motorable. Two modes of transport were available: horse and *Dandi* (an arm-chair carried by four people). Tagore wrote to Andrews on 14 May,



“Here I feel, I have come to the place that I needed most in all the world. ... Today I am already bending my knees to Father Himalaya asking pardon for keeping aloof for so long in blind distrust. The hills all round seem to me like an emerald vessel brimming over with peace and sunshine. The solitude is like a flower spreading its petals of beauty and keeping its honey of wisdom at the core of its heart. My life is full. It is no longer broken or fragmentary”.

This joy reverberates in a song that the Poet wrote in Ramgarh: “Ei lobhinu songo tobo sundor he sundor”. Tagore wrote several pieces in Ramgarh which are as follows: -

Dujone ak hoye jao, matha rakho aker paye (song)

*Haimanti* (short story)

Asharh (essay)

17 May: Chorono dhorote dio go amare (song)

18 May: Gan geye ke janay apon bedona (song)

19 May: Ere bhikhari sajaye ki rongo tumi korile (song)

Ebar je oi elo shorbonashe go (poem)

20 May: Amra choli samukhpane (poem)

Sondhya holo go (song)

24 May: Ei to tomar alokedhenu

26 May: Tomar sonkho dhulay pore (poem)

1 June: Phul phuteche mor ashoner daine baye, puja chhaye

On 17 May, 1914, Gurudev Tagore held a prayer at Ramgarh on his father's 98<sup>th</sup> birthday and wrote to Andrews, “It seems like the symbol of a spiritual new birth. I have been experiencing the feeling of a great expectation, although it has also its elements of great suffering”. Rathindranath Tagore, poet Atul Prasad Sen, several students and teachers from the Santiniketan School and also C.F. Andrews joined the Poet in Ramgarh to spend a memorable vacation. Rathindranath, along with the young, aspiring painter Mukul Chandra De went to the adjacent forest to hunt wild animals and returned home, terrified, having encountered a strange bear with smile on its face. Rathindranath has written a short story on his experience of hunting at Ramgarh besides writing a short piece on his visit to Ramgarh in his autobiography *Pitri-Smriti*. He wrote about how a local worker had been suffering from a prolonged illness with complaints of severe and sudden body tremors. He recovered after Gurudev Tagore treated him with homeopathic medicines. This success made him instantly popular in Ramgarh as a ‘doctor’ and patients started visiting the poet for treatment. Tagore's house in Ramgarh was in a deserted locality with only a couple of families around. Among them, the family of a retired civil servant Sweetenham became



close to the Tagore family and used to invite him at regular intervals for tea. Mukul Dey reminisced that Tagore made three pencil sketches in Ramgarh; almost a decade later, Gurudev Tagore would emerge as a painter at the age of seventy. While in Ramgarh, the poet signed an agreement on the publication of his books with the owner of the Indian Press of Allahabad, Chintamani Ghosh. After spending an eventful summer vacation at Ramgarh, Rabindranath walked 16 miles with C.F. Andrews to Kathgodam, [in the foothills of the Himalayas] to return home, rejecting a '*dandi*' ride.

Ramgarh left a profound impact on the poet's mind. So much so, that Tagore started contemplating deeper associations with the place and its people. In a letter written to his secretary Ajit Kumar Chakrabarty on 8 November 1914, Tagore wrote, "I am here [in Calcutta] for discussions to set up a branch of our school in Ramgarh". It is not clear what his motivations were in starting a branch of his Santiniketan School in a distant hill station like Ramgarh. Like Almora, Ramgarh at that time was a popular wellness destination for people to recover from illness in proximity to nature. Prasanta Kuma Pal, Tagore's biographer, has not ruled out the possibility of establishing a branch of Visa-Bharati as a retreat where ailing students of Tagore's Santiniketan School could be taken for a change in recovering from serious illness. In another letter to C.F. Andrews on 15 November 1914, Tagore wrote,

"Ramgarh is said to be unfavourable during winter; and this is what has induced me to try to go there to enjoy the serene nature for the next few months till it becomes terribly crowded as the weather gets warmed and comfortable. Whatever may happen, I must remain beyond the reach of correspondence. I shall start from Bolpur, where I am going tonight, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of November (Wednesday) by Bombay mail. Rathi will accompany me and possibly *bouma* [daughter-in-law]".

Again, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of November, Tagore wrote to Andrews, "I am starting for Ramgarh tonight and don't know when I shall be back. I shall rely upon my *Jibon-debota* [the almighty charting out one's life] to fix dates for me. I hope he will allow me to stay in the hills till the snows melt and the streams run towards the plains". The harsh and cold weather of Ramgarh prompted Tagore to change his plans and come down to Agra from Ramgarh. On 30 November, the Poet wrote to Andrews, "The Himalayas did not give me a warm enough reception this time and our parting was cold and cheerless. The situation of our house is not at all favourable for wintering. We do not have the afternoon sun on that side, and a chill gloom settles on it before it is evening". As Tagore desired to procure more land in Ramgarh, Andrews went to Allahabad to arrange for it. On his arrival in Allahabad,



Andrews wrote to Tagore from the Government House Allahabad on 23 November informing that he

“came here to stay with Sir James Meston to try to settle up about the plateau above Ramgarh, as that is always the best way to do with busy people and [he is also] keen to get it. [He thought] that it will not be difficult though [he also warned that] the forest people are great stickers. But LGs [Local Governor] are omnipotent despots, and [he is] sure [that]we shall win”.

In 1937, four years before his death, Tagore spent more than a month in Almora. It is not clear whether he visited Ramgarh and his house ‘Haimanti’ during that visit. His desire to start a branch of his school in Ramgarh never materialized. Nonetheless, his appreciative notes about Ramgarh suggest that he was emotionally attached to this spot in the Himalayas. It was thus not surprising that with the beginning of the First World War, the bard again landed at Ramgarh for its peace and solitude which always gave him the food for thought that he articulated in his creative writings.

### **Second Visva-Bharati Campus at Ramgarh, Uttarakhand**

Gurudev wanted to establish a branch of Brahmacharya School at Ramgarh, which was not possible in his lifetime. Now, with the opening of the second satellite campus of Visva-Bharati at Ramgarh, his dream is going to be realized. This will also be a step towards actualizing Gurudev’s idea of Visva-Bharati being a global platform for creating and disseminating knowledge. Our endeavour would have remained elusive had we not had the support that our hon’ble Chancellor, Sri Narendra Modi, India’s Prime Minister and Sri Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank, the hon’ble Minister of Education, Government of India extended as soon as the proposal was mooted. With the personal inputs of the hon’ble Education Minister, it was possible for us to prepare the Detailed Project Report (DPR) for the project by keeping in mind (a) the specific requirements of the area and (b) the necessity of making the process of learning a source of joy and enjoyment. In conformity with the 2020 National Education Policy, the DPR is drawn on the idea that education system, in order to be meaningful to the learners, needs to be

“rooted in Indian ethos that contributes directly to transforming India, that is Bharat, sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high-quality education to all, and thereby making India a global knowledge superpower” (National Education Policy, 2020, p. 6).

That education is a powerful tool of nation-building is a time-tested assumption. By founding Visva-Bharati in 1921, Gurudev Tagore successfully developed a centre for



learning far away from the hurly burly, metropolitan environment of Calcutta. It was not a matter of chance that Maharshi Debendranath Tagore built his Santiniketan Ashram in Bolpur: he wanted to be in a location which was free from the mechanical urbanization that characterized the colonial capital of Calcutta. Gurudev Tagore thought alike. He wanted to start another centre of learning in the Himalayas following the same logic of creating a place which was immune from urban intervention. It is a matter of great joy that Visva-Bharati has succeeded in translating his vision into reality with the personal support of the Government of India, under the stewardship of our hon'ble Chancellor, Sri Modi and the hon'ble Education Minister, Sri Pokhriyal who has been regularly following up with the administration to lead the project to fruition.

As mentioned above, we were governed by the idea that satellite campus at Ramgarh, Uttarakhand, will serve no meaningful purpose unless it does not prepare the learners to face both the local and global challenges and also to contribute effectively to nation-building. Accordingly, the Visva-Bharati campus at Ramgarh shall begin with four academic centres which are:- (a) Centre for Social Sciences and Rural Development, (b) Centre for Languages, (c) Centre for Public Policy and Good Governance and (d) Centre for Himalayan Studies. After having intensive discussion in many brainstorming sessions involving many colleagues and other stakeholders, there evolved a consensus which led to the decision of having the above four centres. It was also agreed upon among those who participated in the deliberations that the University shall be flexible and the rules will be framed accordingly in case there are demands for centres which will serve the learners better. We are thankful that the hon'ble Minister, Sri Pokhriyal also gave his inputs which helped us incorporate these meaningful ideas in the DPR. As this will be an ongoing project, we hope to receive valuable views and opinions for expanding the socio-economic objectives that Gurudev Tagore had in mind when he imagined a Brahmacharya Vidyalaya in the Himalayas.

Let me give an idea of the courses that each Centre shall provide. *First*, the Centre for Social Sciences and Rural Development will have integrated degrees culminating in (a) an MA in Social Work and (b) an MA in Rural Development; besides the two centres, there will be two sub-centres: one for specialized courses on inclusive growth and equity and another on specific programmes on rural development corresponding with what we have at the Sriniketan campus, under the name 'Rural Extension Centre'. *Secondly*, the Centre for Languages shall contain the departments of Sanskrit, Hindi and other endangered



languages which are depleting fast due to the increasing lack of interest in them. We need to pay special attention to these endangered languages since with their disappearance, we will also lose the history of India's socio-cultural diversity, upheld and protected largely by those sections of humanity which have remained marginalized due to the peculiar unfolding of India as a nation both during colonialism and its aftermath. *Thirdly*, in view of growing interest in the study of public policies and the forms and nature of governance, the Centre for Public Policy and Good Governance will attract learners from across fields like History, Political Science, Geography, Economics and Public Administration. The Centre will offer an integrated MA in each of the disciplines and also an integrated MA in Public Policy and Governance, which will be a degree based on inter-disciplinary borrowing since courses will be taught by the experts belonging to the above-mentioned fields of study. *Finally*, seeking to understand and build a repository of knowledge peculiar to the Himalayan region, the Centre for Himalayan Studies shall dwell on the study of the distinct geography, history and the socio-economic and political environment of the Himalayas with the aim of understanding the nature of the people, society and specific behavioural traits which cannot be conceptualized or even comprehended in conventional academic discourses. The aim is also to generate theoretical tools which will assist policy makers and those involved in governance to devise effective policies for protecting our age-old socio-economic traditions which are concomitant to the consolidation of a socio-culturally diverse but emotionally-connected India.

The second campus at Ramgarh, Uttarakhand, is the culmination of a grand experiment of Gurudev Tagore's which was articulated in his heartfelt desire to spread the wings of Visva-Bharati as a uniquely-conceptualized mode of transmitting and also generating knowledge. Opposed to rote learning and education being reduced to marks, Gurudev laid down a detailed scheme for education, which we have emphasized in the 2020 New Education Policy. Aghast by the sense of alienation in those Indian learners who happily accepted the English education of the British era with the Indians at large, the bard discarded the process of learning that flourished during colonialism as purely mechanical and exclusively tuned to the creation of mindless Indians privileging colonizers' partisan benefits over their own. It is true that the scene has not changed radically in independent India, presumably because of the well-entrenched mindset in support of this oppressive



system of learning, which does much to sustain the equations benefiting the wielders of power at the cost of the rest of the country's population.

### **A full-fledged hospital in the campus in the Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) mode**

The other important concern of the present Visva-Bharati administration is to build a super-speciality hospital in the campus. In the Eleventh Plan (2007-2012) allocation for Visva-Bharati, we got Rs. 13.37 Crore capital grant to build a hospital in the complex in which the Pearson Memorial Hospital is located. The building came up, although the dream of having a full-fledged hospital remained elusive since the public funding for this purpose stopped. In other words, the building was erected with the money of the taxpayers though the purpose behind spending so much money from public exchequer remained unrealized. This was the state of affairs when I joined Visva Bharati in November, 2018. Initially, I endeavoured to persuade the MHRD to sanction funds for making the hospital functional, with the medical facilities that are required for a super-speciality hospital. My efforts were in vain since the policies that the Government had adopted by then did not appear to have favoured a venture of this type; and insisted, instead, on the raising of funds by the academic institutions themselves. Besides this option, the Government was keen to popularise PPP mode for developmental works. We began exploring the possibilities of collecting funds for the project, which did not take off as the amount was staggeringly high; hence we opted for the PPP mode and I am happy to announce that many super-speciality hospitals responded to our call. The Hospital Management Committee of Visva-Bharati had one-to-one meetings with those hospitals providing super-speciality care that had applied to be considered for the project. Once this exercise was complete, we approached the University Grants Commission which readily accepted our proposal for having a hospital in the PPP mode by adhering to the Government of India stipulations in this regard. The matter was placed in the meeting of the Finance Committee, held on 18 June, 2020 (through video-conferencing) in which the hon'ble Joint Secretary (MHRD), Sri CS Kumar and the hon'ble Joint Secretary (UGC), Sri JK Tripathi participated. The proposal was discussed and several modifications were suggested, which we incorporated before it was submitted to the MHRD for final approval.

The demand of having a full-fledged hospital has not received as much attention in the past as was required. After joining Visva-Bharati, I witnessed human casualties which could have been avoided had there been appropriate medical care. This was not possible since



the Pearson Memorial Hospital is not at all equipped to handle such emergencies. I took a vow then to work for the building of a super speciality hospital in the campus. I am also happy to announce that with their spontaneous support for the proposal, my colleagues in the Hospital Management Committee and Executive Council made my task easier. And, of course, the MHRD's keenness to help us execute the project is a boon. Being favourably disposed to the project, the MHRD has joined hands with Visva-Bharati by appropriately directing us to avoid further hurdles in fulfilling the mission.

### **Concluding remarks**

This is my last Missive for the time being. Hence this section containing my concluding remarks does not seem to be irrelevant. What are my main findings which I put in these ten Missives, with the purpose of understanding the University and also (if possible) to suggest some ways to bring about radical changes in the nature and functioning of Visva-Bharati, which will help us get better NAAC and NIRF rankings? If those who are associated with the University (as teachers, non-teaching staff, students and other stakeholders) sincerely take steps to accomplish the goal, we will easily fulfil our mission. Let me state clearly that whatever steps I have been forced to take are because of (a) audit objections and (b) the MHRD's instructions. Unless the audit objections are addressed to the CAG's satisfaction, the UGC and MHRD may take any punitive measure that they see fit, which will adversely affect all of us. The aim of the administration is to avoid such a situation. To take Visva-Bharati out of this mess, we need to work together since the University is the source of our survival and the means for our enrichment. It is our duty to help Visva-Bharati return to its former glory.


Let me also say that it is easy to verbally vent one's grievances against the university authorities, especially the Vice Chancellor because University decisions are always attributed to him. It is true that my vision (evolving out of collective deliberations among the colleagues) is directional as far as the University is concerned. However, I have realized that there are many of us who don't seem to be consistent with their ideological and social commitments. It is a matter of disillusionment that those who claim to be *Rabindrik/Ashramik/ Praktonis* resort to language that is contrary to what is expected of them. My earnest request to these respected *Rabindrik/Ashramik/ Praktonis* is to avoid all this unbecoming behaviour since it will, instead of contributing to Visva-Bharati's good health, result in what is most undesirable.



The purpose of these Missives was also to initiate a debate on what should be done to improve Visva-Bharati's NAAC and NIRF rankings. Our colleagues are working tirelessly in this direction since a good ranking will not only bring back Visva-Bharati's past glory, but will also help build a solid foundation for its future. Visva-Bharati does not belong merely to those who are working in the campus, it is also for those who derive sustenance and intellectual inspiration from this great seat of learning. We are committed to evolving an environment in which Visva-Bharati flourishes as an excellent centre for creating and disseminating knowledge. As you all will agree, this is simply impossible unless we (teachers, non-teaching staff, students and other stakeholder) join hands with one another. Let's abandon our egos and remember our responsibility to posterity, so that we can carry forward the legacy that we have inherited providentially by being associated with Visva-Bharati in various capacities (I am including the dwellers of Bolpur in this 'we'); a legacy that Maharshi Debendranath Tagore and Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore founded with a desire to bring about universal humanism in the form of a university -- Visva-Bharati.

As the Corona virus continues to ravage our world, I would urge my readers to stay safe, take care of their families and their neighbours, including the less fortunate, and, as always, to remain physically distant but socially connected.

Keep the faith.

  
Bidyut Chakrabarty  
29/08/2020



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