

My missive, March, 2022

Visva-Bharati is a mighty river that has been carving its distinct course of flow despite severe odds. It's a river as it has been flowing since it was founded in 1921 by one of the illustrious sons of India, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore. It's a mighty river since no evil force has ever succeeded in stopping its flow ever since it came into being. As mentioned above, attempts have constantly been made by the detractors to stop the flow or the change direction to forcibly accept what they considered to be appropriate for their partisan gains. Nonetheless, with Gurudev's blessings, none of them ever succeeded presumably because the evil forces are, as history shows, inherently weak vis-a-vis those who always privileged three Cs - concern, care and compassion - the core values of Gurudev's politico-ideological preferences. The evil forces create ripples, perhaps big bubbles, which automatically bursts as nature does not allow them to remain forever.

One should not however think that Gurudev was free from harassment and humiliation. On many occasions, he was also rattled although he was confident that for the achievement of his own politico-ideological goal, it was merely a hurdle that was certain to strengthen his determination. Examples abound. In his *Chartrapuja*, he frankly stated how the Bengalis undertook all means to pull others down even if that did not accrue gain for them, but they derived pleasure as it harmed others. In his discussion with the essayist Sajani Kanto Das, (published with the title, *Karmi Rabindranath*, he reiterated what he strongly felt about the inbuilt tendencies of the Bengalis in putting others in trouble. This was, according to him, the reason for the downfall of the Bengalis as a community. Nonetheless, the bard never lost his determination and achieved his goals by being steadfastly committed to his cause.

Gurudev's hard work led to the creation of a centre of an alternative pedagogy and mode of learning. So, Visva-Bharati is a living history and also a living philosophy. It has a history with a rich legacy that began unfolding with the foundation of Visva-Bharati in 1921. As a distinct form of pedagogy, Visva-Bharati was committed to develop an all-round personality which was to be developed by introducing individuals not only to the formal courses, but all other modes of learning which contributed to the blossoming of humanity in its true spirit and texture. Hence, the bard set in motion many rituals to connect people with the university. For instance,

the regular prayer on Wednesdays is not just for any specific religious purposes, but aims at creating a platform for bringing people together regardless of socio-cultural differences. Similarly, other regular rituals, like *Push Utsab*, *VasantaUtsab*, *BrikshaRopon* (plantation of trees), *HalaKarshan*(welcoming the season of cultivation), *Baitaliks*(early morning processions with songs in Santiniketan and Sriniketan on occasions), among others. These events have social purposes, namely, on such occasions, those associated with the university shall have an opportunity to be connected with one another and those in the villages around the campus. This is also a rare intervention that Gurudev made because he always believed that it was one's moral responsibility to grow with those around oneself. This was also the reason why Gurudev and his illustrious father, Debendranath Tagore, were always keen to hold Mela or fair because this was the occasion when people mingled with one another without socio-cultural baggage; they mix with one another without being prejudiced by socio-cultural locations of those who also come to the Melas for enjoyment.

It is a matter of shock and disillusionment because Visva-Bharati has gone downhill so rapidly if one assesses its trajectory since its foundation. Being a visionary, Tagore saw most of the reasons which explain the degradation of this reputed university. Otherwise, he wouldn't have written, in his letter to Gandhi that Visva-Bharati which was 'a vessel [carrying] the cargo of [his] life's best treasure ... may claim special care from my countrymen for its preservation' (Tagore to Gandhi, 2 February, 1940). In response, the Mahatma wrote that 'the touching note that you put into my hands ... has gone into my heart [because] Visva-Bharati is a national institution; it is undoubtedly also international. You may depend upon my doing all I can in the common endeavour to assure its permanence'. (Gandhi to Tagore, 19 February, 1940). So committed to his cause that the poet undertook many trips away from home with his musical and dance troupes to earn money for Visva-Bharati. When he was in his early 70s, he performed in many of the programmes to raise funds for the university which made Gandhi upset. It was evident in his letter to Gurudev when the Mahatma expressed his agony by saying that 'it is unthinkable that you should have to undertake another begging mission at your age. The necessary funds must come to you without your having to stir out of Santiniketan' (Gandhi to Tagore, 13 October, 1935). What it shows is the heart-felt concern of the poet for his intellectual creation, Visva-Bharati which was, according to him, a place where the whole

world meets in a single nest (*Yatra VisvamBhavatiekaNidam*). Visva-Bharati was where there is the wealth of mind which is for all. At the heart of his idea remains the clamour for humanity which loses its potential once it is divided. Hence, he, in his creative texts, strongly argued for generating interests in universal humanism. This is the core of his politico-ideological belief.

Here, I must add a caveat to show how Gurudev's winning of Nobel Prize in 1913 metamorphosed Santiniketan from a sleepy town to a vibrant one. This was also a source of income for a group of people who also flourished with Tagore's support. For instance, one family with average academic merit earned enormously by selling land around Santiniketan which was mainly paddy land. As the land price was cheaper, this family bought huge quantity of land as its price was going to go up given the recognition of Gurudev as a world poet following his winning of the Nobel prize in literature. The family made a right calculation; as soon as Tagore returned from Europe after getting the award, everybody in Calcutta who were socio-economically at a higher echelon wanted to buy land and construct houses here in Santiniketan. The place became, all of a sudden, one to add to one's social ranking. In simple terms, buying land by the elites of Calcutta was reflective of their endeavour to gain social respectability by being physically close to the Nobel laureate. A former village suddenly became a hub of intellectual uplift. The family that bought land at a cheaper rate and also by sometime befooling the simple peasants became excessively rich overnight.

Deviation from the ideas that Gurudev held so dear

The history between the foundation of Visva-Bharati in 1921 and its transformation as a Central University or "an Institution of National Importance" in 1951 is a testimony of how the university became a centre of personal bickering. The process started with the assumption of Rathindranath Tagore, Gurudev's eldest son, as the first Vice Chancellor of the University. One of the reasons for making Rathindranath the first Vice Chancellor was governed by the idea of continuity with the past that he was capable of maintaining. He however remained totally ignorant that running Visva-Bharati in the absence of his father was a different kind of ball game since those who worked with the poet also claimed to be the true heir of Tagore's legacy. When none of them was given the top position, the disgruntled souls were united to make his life terribly difficult and miserable. The situation became complicated with the independence of

India since the nationalist leaders who were emotionally attached with Visva-Bharati earlier became busy with the governance of a new nation which was mutilated following the partition of 1947. In other words, given the fact that they were burdened with the responsibility of managing the divided country, they did not pay much attention to what was happening in Visva-Bharati then. Rathindranath Tagore did not seem to have an iota of mistrust with his colleagues who flourished with his father's care and guidance. He failed to gauge their capacity to harm him not only by labelling false charges of financial embezzlement against him but also of moral turpitude. He became a lonely man and did not seem to have had the support from those in Delhi responsible for governing this Central University of national importance. No help was forthcoming. A situation was created when he had no option but to leave Visva-Bharati for Dehradun where he died in 1961. Recently, the novelist Sri Nabakumar Bose graphically illustrated the story of Rathindranath's agony and pain as a lonely soul during his stay as Vice Chancellor of Visva-Bharati (Nabakumar Bose, *TomarAloTomarAandhar* (in Bangla), Pratibhas, Kolkata, 2017). In a nutshell, Rathindranath was a victim of personal feud with those who were clearly jealous of him by being declared a true heir of Rabindranath Tagore. The family that built an empire of wealth by selling the land purchased cheaply with a high premium was one of the prominent families that led the defaming campaign against him by stooping so low which was beyond description. In contemporary parlance, that family was one of the first families that financially thrived out of what is, in local parlance, known as the business of *promotary* (it is a business which helps one make money by acting as a middle man).

A perusal of the memoirs of the former Vice Chancellors confirms how Rathindranath was harmed by the powerful vested interest groups comprising many disgruntled souls, including the Ashramiks, the so-called Rabindriks, the local politicians, the business communities, the land sharks and those teachers who survive on chaos presumably because they are completely detached from their academic endeavour. It was not a matter of surprise when the former Vice Chancellor, Professor NimaiSadhanBasu characterized Visva-Bharati as *BhagnaNeer* or *Broken Nest*. Later, Professor Rajat Roy, in his long text in the Bengali magazine, *Desh* (17 August, 2019) echoed some of the concerns that his predecessors underlined. According to him, the downfall of Visva-Bharati is an outcome of (a) internecine feud involving the stakeholders

and the wild spread of vested interests. Even the great scientist, Professor Satyen Bose, an erstwhile Vice Chancellor was reported to have said that the future of Visva-Bharti was bleak because of the congregation of many knaves which caught him by surprise since how it was possible for so many people with nefarious mission to remain in as small a place as Santiniketan. Professor Roy further added in this essay in *Desh* that Visva-Bharati became “BolpurBharati” and “Santiniketan instead of being an abode of peace, became and abode of disturbances (*Ashanti*)”. The charge has substance because of the sustained inbreeding both in the appointment of teachers and administrative personnel. He was correct in saying that such deliberate practice purged Visva-Bharati of its international, nay national character which was contrary to the moto of Visva-Bharati, *Yatra VisvamBhavatyekanidam* (where the world makes a home in a single nest). During my tenure, I endeavoured hard to appoint both academic staff and non-academic staff to be respectful to the espoused ideas of the founder, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore of making Visva-Bharati an international hub of academic activities.

None of the so-called stakeholders seem to be ashamed when Tagore’s Nobel Medallion was stolen from Rabindra Bhawan; it never becomes an issue of concern when the moderated question papers are purloined from Sangeet Bhavan in 1921. No stings were attached when a former Vice Chancellor (Professor Dilip Sinha) was jailed for providing jobs to an ineligible candidate; nobody bothers when another former Vice Chancellor (Professor Susanta Dutta Gupta) regularly attends the CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation) courts now for making many illegal appointments and also extending undue favour to the new appointees.

The decline of Visva-Bharati is very sharp and visible which is also a part of the decadence of morality and intellectual honesty all over the country. As a result, that the students will imbibe some of the values nurtured by the stakeholders to pull Visva-Bharati down does not seem to be surprising. It is my strong belief that without the instigation of the disgruntled souls (teachers and others), the students would not have been so derailed that they lost their humanity which was evident when I was gheraoed for eleven days in 2021 along with my two kids. They went to the extent of stopping the supply of food, medicine and other necessary items for daily survival and this was supplemented by abuse during those days of our captivity with chosen expletives. I wonder whether this was Rabindrik tradition! Those joining Visva-Bharati seem to

lose their humanity which was confirmed when during our eleven days of internment, none of those who survive on income from Visva-Bharati did not bother to come forward to set the Vice Chancellor free. In the campus, there is one common practice of locking the door of the offices in case the officers are inside the room or buildings. It is simply hooliganism of a combination of the so-called students and their cronies. Only the court acted as a saviour on every occasion. In Visva-Bharati, rules are for the fools and might is right. If a Vice Chancellor and his/her team stand against this goondaism, supported by other dissatisfied elements, she/he shall face sustained attack, both verbal and physical. In case, the Vice Chancellor is not available, the Registrar and his office colleagues bear the brunt, as the event in the last week of February, 2022 demonstrated. Being confined illegally in his office, the Registrar was not even allowed to perform his religious rites on Shiv Ratri and was also denied access to medical care for his colleague, a Joint Registrar, when he was sick. Does it reflect an iota of humanity for which Gurudev devoted his whole life? I wonder. Does it also mean that Gurudev for them is a convenient tool to satisfy their personal ends; as soon as there is an obstruction, the so-called stakeholders do not feel hesitant to stoop low to prove that, for them, being Rabindrik is nothing but a design to pursue narrow aims.

Bringing people together

Being a believer of universal humanism, Tagore's approach to humanity is directed to design a mode of creating a platform for collectivity since he believed that most of problems confronting humanity can easily be tackled by being united. In order to accomplish his objective, he devised many rituals to just attract people regardless of their social rank. Prominent among them is, for instance, regular prayer at the *Kaanch Mandir* or UpashanaGrihya on every Wednesdays. Visva-Bharati holds thirty-nine prayers a year. It causes severe pain when one notices the miniscule attendance in regular mandirs. I wonder whether the so-called Rabindriks will shed crocodile tears at this! Similarly, in *Baitaliks* (early morning procession in the Ashram area on special occasions), which are five in number, the presence of those who thrive on income from Visva-Bharati is too meagre to generate doubts about the sincerity of the so-called Rabindriks. It is not however strange in Visva-Bharati because being a self-proclaimed Rabindrik is a means to gain financially and other respects. The same is true of the so-called Ashramiks who hardly contribute to the well-being of today's Visva-Bharati. I personally

approached them for financial contribution to build a corpus fund which does not exist here despite the fact that this university is the oldest Central University. To my dismay, no help came from them which means that they hold the Visva-Bharati authority in high esteem so long as their partisan gains are safeguarded; as soon as it is otherwise, they will unhesitatingly take out their fangs to show their astonishing low level of human integrity.

Some of the academic faculty seem to have been entrapped in this maze. They tend to hold the authority responsible without recognizing their deplorable contribution in building and sustaining such a disheartening eco system in the campus. What is most disenchanting is the fact that they don't mind even instigating the students to insist on their unjust demands. This is nothing but a design to utilize others for the fulfilment of their narrow ends. Here I must draw their attention to the famous poem by the German poet, Martin Niemoller (1892-1984) who wrote:

*First, they came for the socialist, and I did not speak out –
Because I was not a socialist.
Then they came for the trade unionist, and I did not speak out –
Because I was not a trade unionist
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out –
Because I was not a Jew
Then they came for me – and there no one left to speak for me.*

By supporting those who have no humanistic concern and also no respect for the Grand Legacy of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, the disgruntled members of Visva-Bharati academic faculty appear to have been involved in creating a Frankenstein which will be an uncontrollable source of their agony sooner or later. This is a historical truth. Many giants of history evaporated as they stood against humanity and also those values which sustained humanity despite odds. One of the results of such irresponsible behaviour was evident in the events that started unfolding since the last week of February, 2022. The unruly mob comprising the so-called students of Visva-Bharti stoop so low that it causes serious heart-burning to those who really wanted to protect the legacy of Visva-Bharati. Those who lost their hegemony since the change of guard in 2018, they however rejoiced once the authority was heckled. I remind them of the above poem by Niemoller. History is a fair judge and they will not be spared; their pecuniary benefit and their apparent higher social standing as they gained materially by being associated with

Tagore's transcendental achievements, may not be adequate in the face of socio-ideological avalanche of the future. History will not forgive them for devising nefarious designs to halt the endeavours towards taking Visva-Bharati to an exalted height, as some of the authorities were engaged in the task during their stay as decision makers.

It is easier to blame the students for disturbances in the campus. This is certainly simplistic in view of the fact that those who carve out a specific course of action for them were the principal culprits. The nature of one's behaviour or mis-behaviour is first the outcome of socialization in the family. In the Indian lexicon, a child gets his *sanskar* from his/her family. If the *sanskar* is to make the child deviant, it gets reflected in his/her behaviour later. So, the elders in the family have a responsibility to provide the right kind of *sanskar*. Later, the teachers, both in school and colleges, play a critical role. So, today's students behave the way they are taught in the family and in schools and colleges. This is one of the manifestations of social decadence and cultural deficit which are clearly evident in contemporary India's socio-political space.

In West Bengal, the academic scene is most deplorable for variety of historical reasons: West Bengal suffered due to partition; it also suffered due to a sudden arrival of the hapless people from the other side of pre-partitioned Bengal; the province had to accommodate these refugees; the state also suffered due to the outbreak of the Naxalite Movement in the 1970s which, instead of bringing about a proletariat revolution made the state proletariat since it saw a flight of capital and flight of talent to other less politically-troubled parts of India; the province saw the rise and fall of the Left government after being in power for more than three decades; the state also saw the emergence and consolidation of tendencies to gain financially at others cost; it also saw the increasing importance of muscle power, the brunt of which was borne primarily by those in rural areas; the province saw the change of political guards in 2011 which was, in popular parlance, characterized as the change of jersey since the system that evolved in the past was allowed to remain perhaps with more virulence with the rise of the local wielders of power who play a key role in garnering votes for their ultimate political bosses. So, the state saw the growth and consolidation of a *quid-pro-quo* arrangement between the top political bosses and their local disciples. In the implementation of the policy designs that are made at the state level,

they remain significant players which make them indispensable in being in power for the state-level political bosses for long.

Given the appalling socio-economic scene, employment in the private sector is almost nil which led people to go for jobs in government and other public sector. Such scarcity creates middlemen who liaison between the government agencies and the job seekers in exchange of money and other benefits which help the local *bahuwali* build a base given his/her capability of providing placement in government and other public sectors. Examples can be multiplied. Recently (in 2022) the Calcutta High Court came out heavily against these practices by even declaring the list of successful job aspirants null and void. What the Calcutta High Court saw is just the tip of the iceberg since malpractices become the norm as the recent High Court observations reveal. Do the flight of capital and flight of talent therefore mean that West Bengal has no future? There cannot be a conclusive answer although one is a little uncertain to be entirely optimistic.

How is it then possible to halt this steady decline? Or, will Visva-Bharati gradually fade away as a centre of learning? Let me share a story which I heard from one of the academicians who served Visva-Bharati for more than three decades. The story runs like this: one day, three Vice Chancellors from different parts of the world went Lord Shiva to find out the future of the universities that they presided over. One was from the West, another from the Far-East and another from Visva-Bharati. The Vice Chancellor from the West was consoled by Lord Shiva that most of his problems ceased to exist in twenty-five years; his colleague from the Far East came out with a smiling face since Lord Shiva assured him with certainty that his university would be free from trouble in thirty years; now, it was the turn of Visva-Bharati's Vice Chancellor. On seeing him, Lord Shiva started sobbing because he himself was not sure whether Visva-Bharati regained the glory that it had in the past during his life time! The crux of the story is too evident to deserve an elaboration. The future of Visva-Bharati worried Lord Shiva as he was unable to provide a specific time-line as he gave to the Vice Chancellors from the West and Far-East. The story may be a little exaggerated since the problems confronting the university do not appear to be insurmountable provided the stakeholders remain steadfastly committed to the vision that its great founder had when he started this global seat of creation

and dissemination of knowledge. It is well-substantiated that Visva-Bharati becomes, over the years, a centre for fulfilling partisan goals which generated the common feelings that here rules and regulations make no sense. Everything can be done by '*Dadagiri*' or flexing muscle. I don't blame my predecessors; they might have their constraints which forced them to dilute rules and regulations to avoid trouble or to purchase peace at the cost of the institution. Nonetheless, I shall be failing in my duty if I don't underline the fact that a Vice Chancellor of Visva-Bharati is an oath-bound head who accept the assignment with a commitment to carry forward the university by keeping pace with the rapidly changing socio-economic milieu along with the ideas that Gurudev Tagore espoused to set out the foundational principles for this academic institution. Till it was made a Central University, it was rather easier for the head of Visva-Bharati to govern because the Visva-Bharati Act of 1951 did not exist then. With the adoption of this Act, Visva-Bharati started receiving financial grants for its survival from the Union Exchequer which put the university within a framework of rules and regulations, the violation of which was detrimental to its existence as a Central University. So, the Vice Chancellors and the entire administration came under the vigil of the administrators in the department of Education, Government of India. It was good and bad at the same time, for many of those associated with the university: it was good because the take-over by the Union Government ensured a good pay package in comparison with those working in the state-run universities and also the regular release of salaries and other benefits which were not available to their counterparts in the State-managed universities; it was bad because, now, they lost their freedom which they enjoyed before Visva-Bharati became a Central University. It was a no-win situation for them for obvious reasons. The grip of the restrictions drawn on the rules and regulations became stringent in course of time which was a source of disenchantment although they never expressed their dismay over the hike in their monthly salary. So, proverb is valid that "so long as a system allows one to enjoy rights, one is on top of the moon; but the moment one is reminded of one's duties, one becomes the most annoyed soul". A perusal of the recorded memoirs of the former Vice Chancellors confirms this beyond doubt. The situation became worse as days passed on. One of the reasons was perhaps the failure of the university authorities to stand against attacks by the vested interests on Visva-Bharati. In other words, as the authorities buckled down to the pressure of those seeking to fulfil their partisan interests,

Visva-Bharati started deviating from the mandate of the Act and also the values which Gurudev Tagore sought to instill among the learners.

What is the way out?

No Vice Chancellor has the *Aladin's magic lamp*. Hence, we need to suggest ways and means to revive the fast-declining Visva-Bharati also by taking into account the core principles on which it rests.

First of all, those who love Visva-Bharati not for any personal gain, but for protecting the grand vision of Gurudev Tagore need to come together. It cannot be an easy task given the well-entrenched vested interests of the so-called well-wishers of the university. Nor it can be done overnight given the fact that the decline of Visva-Bharati began since its upgradation as a Central University in 1951, as the recently published biographical-novel by Sri Nabakumar Basu very persuasively argued. Despite being a very slow process, there is no doubt nothing is impossible once concerted human efforts in a mission mode are made.

Secondly, there is also a need to change the mindset of those who survive on Visva-Bharati. It does not seem odd that the local hoteliers, small shopkeepers, those who ply e-rickshaws and other businessmen are insistent that Visva-Bharati should organize Poush Mela and Vasanta Utsab since these two events attract many tourists which means that if they are not held, one of their major sources of income disappears. So, the emphasis on holding these events is solely governed by the selfish interests of that section with an exclusive aim since they hardly help in organizing these events which are the responsibilities of Visva-Bharati. Both these events see regular footfalls of more two lakhs a day. Visva-Bharati has neither the manpower to manage such a huge crowd nor has the financial strength to bring back the grounds where these events take place to normalcy. During my tenure, it was done by some of the faculty members, non-teaching staff and some caring students. The same is true of Vasanta Utsab which is now reduced to Vasanta Tandav (Vasanta rampage) which means that instead of being a sensible participant to enjoy the event, it is being used to fulfil also the carnal desires by many. It was evident in 2019; our girl students were taken back for their safety to a hostel next to the Ashram ground where the 2019 Vasanta Utsab was organized. We were informed by

many journalists of misbehaviour especially to women after the event was over. The town was paralyzed since countless cars came from various parts of the province and outside, and the traffic management by the police was a complete failure since the traffic was really heavy and the police did not have adequate manpower to manage the movement of the so many vehicles. I was told that just to cover half-a-mile, one needed more than two hours. For the inhabitants of Bolpur and Santiniketan, it was a nightmarish experience. The situation was appalling as on the day following the event, we collected many Wine, Beer, Rum and Whisky bottles and tons of plastic water pouches from the ground. Those who earned enormously at the cost of Visva-Bharati never came forward to clean the ground either after Poush Mela or VasantaUtsab because they happily abdicate their responsibility which, they made us believe, lies with Visva-Bharati which further confirms that we will enjoy our rights without being respectful to our duties. And most of those who came to enjoy the event, they did not bother to be sensitive to the ideas which acted critically in the organization of VasantaUtsab by Gurudev Tagore in response to an urge of his youngest son, Samindranath Tagore. For the outsiders, it was a day of picnic as well, as we found the left-over of food items on the ground when we launched the cleaning operation one day after the event.

Thirdly, the other events that Visva-Bharati holds regularly (Wednesday's prayer, *BrikshaRopon*, *HalaKarshan*, *MaghUtsab*, *Shilpa Utsab*) are not as attractive as *Poush Mela* or *VasantaUtsab* since they are not as ludicrous sources of making money as those two events. Here I must add that Poush Mela began as one for the local artisans to sell their hand-made products which is no longer the case since they hardly get buyers who mostly go to those shops selling highly commercialized merchandise. So, instead of helping many dying handicrafts, the Poush Mela has privileged the rich businessmen from many parts of the country. A thorough enquiry of the stall distribution before the system of online-booking was introduced shall uncover a scam in which many of those associated with Visva-Bharati were alleged to have been involved. This is not to argue that Poush Mela should be closed; this is just to make an appeal to those willing to carry forward the Rabindrik tradition in its true sense to address the anomalies, mentioned above.

Fourthly, Visva-Bharati had a bad name because of the allegation that many of the teachers were reported to have come to the campus once a week. An academic staff of Sriniketan campus told me a very interesting story on this. According to him, there were many faculty members who came to the campus from Kolkata by catching the Gourbanga Express that left Kolkata very early in the morning which enabled the teachers to take classes from 9 am; the class schedule was set out in a particular format to allow them to catch Shanti (Santiniketan Express) at 1-10 pm. Before going to Bolpur station, they invariably bought fish from Lakhapati, the local seller of fish, since he had the reputation of giving good quality of fishes. I checked the time-table and to my surprise, I found that this was far from being false. I also received the input that these commuters normally sit together in D-2 compartment of Santiniketan Express. At the beginning of my stint as Vice Chancellor, I sat in D-2 compartment of the train to check whether it was true. And, to my surprise, this was also far from being false. With my chowkidari, the situations appear to have improved and teacher absenteeism does not seem to be as severe as it was in the past.

Fifthly, the absenteeism or late-attendance in the office never appeared to have bothered the full-time employees of Visva-Bharati. Initially, I found out that there was no time for the non-teaching employees and they escaped punishment by being protected by the local political bosses. On my regular visit, the issue was conclusively addressed, I assumed. After sometime, it was reported to me that the earlier habit happily returned presumably they thought that it would not be noticed. What was surprising that the disease affected everybody, beginning from the officers to the peons. I made surprise visits to the offices, including the Central Administrative Office and made a rule that employees were required to put their signature in the attendance registers which were kept in the Vice Chancellor's secretariat. I have reasons to believe that this disease has got a right kind of medicine and problem of absenteeism and late attendance seem to have been things of the past. I share a piece of information which one of the former Visva-Bharati students and now working in a school in Bolpur told me. After thanking me, he conveyed that the Bolpur shopkeepers expressed gratitude to me as the sale of tiffin box had gone up exponentially. He further stated that before my arrival, the employees of Visva-Bharati did not have an idea of tiffin box as they came and left the office at their own will. So, they never felt the need of following the half-an-hour lunch break as per the rule book. The

purpose of narrating the story is to put across the point that the non-teaching staff need to be punctual in their attendance and ready to finish their allotted works. The officers are also expected to show by example which means that by coming to the office on time they also follow the rule book.

Finally, it is difficult, if not impossible, to instill commitment by applying means which may not be pleasant. Commitment should come to oneself instinctively. One should remember that those who work for Visva-Bharati regardless of their rank are being regularly handsomely paid out of taxpayers' money. In comparison with those working in private sectors, and also in other universities, Visva-Bharati employees are better placed also in terms of benefits and facilities. We don't serve the university out of charity; we get paid for the man-days that we give to the university for fulfilling its academic objectives. We are therefore required to be morally sensitive to our commitment to the university. Nobody has the right to abuse his/her colleagues or those holding administrative responsibilities, including the Vice Chancellor, Registrar, Principals, Head of the Departments and other office holders. It shows our moral bankruptcy. Will the removal of authorities conclusively address the widely-hyped concerns? If that be so, with the arrival of a new Vice Chancellor and the formation of a new team of administrators the troublesome issues raised by the self-proclaimed custodians of Visva-Bharati would have immediately disappeared. I have mostly understood the principal reasons for such eruptions by the students, teachers and non-teaching staff which may not be sacrosanct; It requires a thorough discussion among those drawing a regular income from Visva-Bharati because this is that proverbial goose that lays a gold egg at regular intervals. The goose needs to be nurtured with care, concern and compassion. In case, we deviate, perhaps that will be a *hara-kiri* for us who are fulfilling their espoused material goals out of our income from this great academic institution. Instead of digging our own grave, let us brainstorm together to arrive at a solution not with a view to protecting selfish interests but for securing a better future for Visva-Bharati. This is the only task ahead of us; otherwise, we will be reduced to villains of history because of our failure to sustain the politico-ideological foundation of Visva-Bharati and also due to our inability to discharge an appropriate role as true custodians of Rabindrik tradition.

The purpose of this missive is not to undermine or demean the contributions of those who worked for Visva-Bharati and also who are working now, but to reinforce the exhortation by the widely – circulated proverb that “*Dahse Mile Kori Kaaj, Hari-JitiNahiLaaj*” (if we work together, even if we lose, it does not matter). This is the reaffirmation of the English proverb that “*United We Win, Divided We Fall*”. Here is the core of Gurudev Tagore’s belief that he espoused throughout his life amidst adversaries. Let’s rise like the phoenix which is not impossible with the blessings of Visva-Bharati’s founder.