

## From the Vice Chancellor's Desk

### Missive for November, 2023

What is Visva-Bharati? On the surface, it is generally considered to be an institution of higher learning, just like any other centres, that provides degrees after the completion of specific years of training. What is sadly missing if Visva-Bharati is judged accordingly because it completely misses the institution's role in transmitting a philosophy of universal humanism which remains the only ideational vision Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore espoused in his plethora of creative writings. One of the pictorial manifestation is available in a significant text, entitled *Prarthana* (printed in the compilation, *Santiniketan*, Vol. 1 (pp. 23-26). Gurudev Tagore's articulation of an important aspect of his philosophical dispensation was drawn on an Upanishadic story involving Yagyabalkya and his wives, Matriyea and Katayani. As is well-known, when the sage Yagyabalkya decided to leave family for tapasya, he also made up his mind to distribute his material possession to his wives, Matriyea and Katayani: while the latter was happy once the sage gave her half of his possessions the former refused because she was keen to acquire knowledge by being her husband's disciple. She thus exclaimed that what she would do with the possession had she not been able to understand many important areas of knowledge which she thought was critical to her existence as a human being. This story was one of the sources of Gurudev Tagore's inspiration and it was manifested when he started Visva-Bharati which was not only conceptualized in the conventional format of a university but differently because it was conceived as a design for transmission of a specific philosophical dispensation in favour of human well-being.

### Milestones in charting out the growth of Visva-Bharati

There are three milestones in the growth of Visva-Bharati as an institution of international repute. With the foundation of Patha Bhavana in 1901, Visva-Bharati's journey as a centre for generation and dissemination of knowledge began. The institution of Visva-Bharati in 1921 is a continuity with the tradition. Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore was the chief architect who steered the institution to unfold in accordance with his distinct approach to education. Like many of his like-minded predecessors, the bard strongly felt that education was a means to help evolve a critical mindset. Being convinced of the significant role of education, the poet carved a new path for transmission of knowledge by devising a model which discarded class room teaching. The idea was drawn on the bard's own dislike for teaching based on bookish learning.

As mentioned above, there are three milestones: first, it was 1913 when Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. It was a milestone because with this distinction, Gurudev Tagore became a global icon because, despite being a colonial subject, it was inconceivable; and, yet, with his poetic prowess, he received accolades from those who colonized India to civilize what they defined as barbarian India. It was Gurudev Tagore who acted critically in shaping the nature of education that flourished at Visva-Bharati. The year, 1951, heralded a new phase in Visva-Bharati's unfolding as a centre of higher learning which is the second milestone.

There were two reasons: (a) Visva-Bharati was made a central university with the tag of being institution of national importance, and (b) the transformation of Visva-Bharati into a central university, the first of its kind in India was also the fulfillment of Mahatma Gandhi's desire to support Gurudev Tagore's mission. As is well-known, the bard owed a great deal to the Mahatma who stood by him when the former was uncertain whether Visva-Bharati would survive after he was gone. There is no denying that had Gandhi not endorsed Gurudev's concern, Visva-Bharati would have disappeared. The declaration of Santiniketan as a World Heritage Site on 17 September, 2023 by UNESCO is the third significant milestone in Visva-Bharati's history as an academic centre. The effort for this had begun in 2011 although it did not lead to fruition. Perhaps the endeavour was not directed to the attainment of this goal. The point is made to emphasize the fact that many contributed to this accolade. It is Gurudev Tagore who provided us with the motto of the world being a nest which created Visva-Bharati an abode of universal humanism. Those who were associated with him had also played critical roles; a phase was ushered in 1951 with the acceptance of Visva-Bharati as the first central university; those who pursued Gurudev's ideational vision after Visva-Bharati became a government-sponsored academic institution discharged their responsibilities as well. Now, the present administrative dispensation, students, teachers, non-teaching staff and also well-wishers of Visva-Bharati were also integral to the effort towards attaining the objective. What is emphasized here is the claim that in the achievement of this global recognition of Santiniketan where Visva-Bharati is located, many had contributed to the cause.

### ***Responsibilities***

Santiniketan is now a World Heritage Site and we need to work hard to protect this rare glory. The poet expressed this in many of his codified texts. Prominent among them is a play, *Visarjan (Sacrifice)* where the bard stated that it is easier to get the crown; what is however far more difficult is to hold it since it involves fulfillment of many responsibilities. And, the pursuit of roles tuned to the well-being of the ruled is of great necessity to retain the crown. This is metaphorically explained. The point is a reiteration of the claim that one needs to be sensitive enough to one's assigned role. Hence, there is no escape route. Given the threat that the tag - World Heritage Site - can also be withdrawn in case the stringent conditions are not complied with to remain a heritage site. Recently, the ICOMOS (International Commission on Monuments and Sites) found that the assembly building built by the famous architect, Corbuiser, in Chandigarh is not architecturally compatible with the heritage structure. Hence, the assembly building is now kept in the list of endangered sites which means that even if corrective measures are not immediately taken it may lose its status as a World Heritage Site. It needs to be mentioned here that one of declared Global Heritage Site in Germany lost the tag as it failed to remain so in accordance with the stringent conditions being followed in case of these sites.

Being one of the major architects of the recognition of Santiniketan as a World Heritage Site, the present administration fulfilled its historical role in adverse circumstances. Santiniketan is notoriously famous for enjoying the failure of administration in attaining an espoused goal. Hence, the recognition of Santiniketan as a Heritage Site was hardly as enjoyable as it should have been

presumably because the achievement of administration continues to disappoint the detractors. It was evident. The UNESCO declaration did not create the euphoria among many of those associated with Visva-Bharati and those outside the campus because they alleged that they were not given adequate importance as per their expectations. One is invariably drawn to a comparable recognition of Durga Puja in the category of intangible Heritage which the state government upheld with zeal and was appreciated in grandeur. In contrast, the identification of Santiniketan as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO hardly received attention from the state government perhaps due to political reasons which are not rationally fathomable.

The recognition of Santiniketan as a World Heritage Site also reconfirms that Santiniketan is known for upholding the unique values Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore espoused despite odds. And, yet, Visva-Bharati's progress does not seem to be commensurate with what is capable. The institution is labelled with wrongly construed tags despite being recognised globally as a worth-emulating centre of academic learning. Perhaps, the ecosystem is created to generate a mindset well-equipped to restrain those seeking to take Visva-Bharati forward. Being crippled by corruption is what does not seem to bother those drawing their sources of livelihood. In fact, the pursuit of partisan goals by bypassing rules and regulations and also others' legitimate interests has been accepted as NORMAL. The contrary is not acceptable. Violation of rules is the well-established practice. Those striving to halt the decline need to be heckled and hit them below the belt because the miscreants/deviants have the majority to bolster their claim. Some of the past Vice Chancellors who were globally reputed for their academic prowess demitted their office before completing their five-year term by being entirely disillusioned because deviation from rule should not be condemned and an administrator would survive well provided s/he was blind to the deviant practices being allowed to spread in the campus and outside. If the administrator is conscientious, s/he is certain to be abused and harmed in many ways because the disgruntled souls from various walks of life shamelessly congregate to disturb tranquility in the campus just to rattle the Vice Chancellor and the administration. The Vice Chancellor is physically lonely although it is believed that Gurudev's blessings for those pursuing the transmitted ideational vision Gurudev Tagore empowers him/her. In fact, amidst the sustained attacks and counter-attacks, the completion of Vice Chancellor's term of five years is an achievement. The contention is valid because many legendary Bengalis, like the scientist Satyendra Nath Bose, famous economist, Amlan Dutta or a famous historian, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya were unable to complete the term of five years. Hence my success in finishing a five-year term is highly extraordinary. I owe a great deal to those who stood by me despite being targeted or threatened by the detractors during these five years.

### ***My realization***

I have gained a lot by being Visva-Bharati's Vice Chancellor. I have succeeded in fulfilling my academic feats. I have had a mission to write a logically-defensible historical biography of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore. Because the bard is primarily identified as a litterateur, only those specialized in literature had exclusive rights to analytically dissect his views and ideas. This is a valid claim although by emphasizing this aspect one tends to ignore the politico-ideological vision

of the poet. Gurudev had well-defined ideational priorities concerning human well-being. The aim here is to understand Gurudev Tagore as a socio-cultural rebel who also designed a model for eradicating socio-cultural schism along with India's political emancipation. Furthermore, my five-year stint also allowed me to meaningfully understand the changed nature of the Bengalis who claim to be different given their being nurtured in the environment of Santiniketan, the abode of peace which unfolded by being sensitive to the ideational vision of Rabindranath Tagore.

Principles and compliance with norms appear to be foreign to many of us at Visva-Bharati. But we tend to justify deviation and violation and, at the same time, remain Rabindrik in our perception. What an irony? The views of the founder of Visva-Bharati in this Heritage location are distorted at the drop of the hat as they support the activities linked with the realization of exclusive goals. The ecosystemic balance needs to be maintained due to factors which are remotely connected with the core values on which Gurudev Tagore's "treasure of life", Visva-Bharati rests. For those who are accustomed to be deviants, none of the efforts seeking obedience to what constitutes Rabindrik ideational vision thus hardly yield results. So, the easy option is to engage collectively in mudslinging those who remain committed to what Gurudev espoused.

As Visva-Bharati is being exploited over decades perhaps due to the inability of the administration to combat the evil forces, corruption and Visva-Bharati appear to be synonymous. Hence, attempts to bring this Heritage place back to rail are likely to generate opposite and venomous reactions as they attack those championing and also refining their modes of pursuing partisan interests. What is strange is the collection of those who are otherwise socially known and also respected at times for their capabilities. This does not seem strange as it is not alien to humanity. As the author of *Artha Sastra*, Kautilya mentioned in a completely different socio-economic and politico-cultural milieu, corruption is an integral ingredient of human behaviour as human beings. By drawing on an analogy of fish drinking water while drawing oxygen from water, those dealing with state coffers, argued Kautilya, could never restrain themselves from resorting to practices contrary to the administrative ethos. The tradition continues and dealing with corruption is an important aspect of governance in the contemporary world. It is now impossible to pursue the argument that human existence can be conceptualized in a corruption-free context.

The situation is dismal as corruption appears to have developed organically. Does it mean that there is no way out. Apparently, the answer is no in view of the fact that corruption being organic to humanity is deep-rooted in every society. There is however another aspect. Each nation-state has evolved mechanisms to meaningfully attack corruption. What however appears to be lacking in general is a strong mindset of those responsible for this task due largely to the politicization of administration. This is a strong deterrent to those appointed to weed out corruption. So, the political bosses needs to discharge their duties by being steadfastly committed to their role as responsible agent of human well-being. We must not forget that mere punitive devices are not adequate. What is required is to develop norms, values and mores in society contrary to what appears to be

supportive of corruption. In other words, an exemplary punishment of corrupt persons will certainly work in this respect, but is unlikely to completely uproot the mindset complementary to corruption. The most important aspect in this battle against corruption is to develop a mindset contributing to those values, norms and mores acting decisively against forces with contrarian objectives and tendencies.

The above contention may sound utopian. A surface reading of contemporary societies leads one to believe so. However, in a context when socio-ideological forces challenging corruption have gained momentum, many efforts, undertaken to effectively counter the phenomenon, have created a hope that a corruption free human existence does not appear to be utopian. Visva-Bharati can be a torchbearer as many of the designs effectively attacking corruption have yielded result and the forces defending corruption seem to have considerably lost their sheen. However, one cannot confidently argue that Visva-Bharati is a corruption free academic institution. What is now plausible is to suggest that processes for eradicating corruption appear to have gained strength to a significant extent for two reasons: (a) the administration leaves no stone unturned to undertake steps to hit at the root of corruption which, of course, have helped develop an unholy alliance among those who, so far, prospered by being uncritical supporters of corruption. Examples abound; and (b) those who were voiceless in the past dispensation despite their clearly defined position against corruption have now become active partners in this battle with the administration. It means that the mindset which was weak in the past has become dominant vis-a-vis the one in support of corruption. That this mindset is too powerful to be decimated so easily, which was the case earlier, is one of the positive developments in the last five years (2018-2023). As history demonstrates and is corroborated by Gurudev Tagore in many of his creative texts, what has begun at Visva-Bharati will spread to other places and the forces opposed to corruption will be too strong to be dismissed as was the case in the past at Visva-Bharati. The emergence of a mindset effectively challenging forces favouring corruption in the campus may be a ripple, but cannot be wished away because, as history has shown, "a single spark can start a prairie fire".

### ***Critique of groupism***

I keep hearing that those who claim to have been associated with me or the present administration have not been adequately rewarded. The issue has a basis in the light of Visva-Bharati's past or for that matter any of the larger organizations. Individuals associated with the administration, willynilly as well, expect gains for their support to administrative feats of the present dispensation. Their logic is perfectly framed because if corruption is the rule the group benefit does not seem to be contradictory with the well-entrenched practices. In a nutshell, there is nothing wrong, it seems, to expect tangible gain in return of support to administration. Those who are inadvertently persuaded by this logic that they should be adequately rewarded for their support amidst adverse circumstances which means that the importance of the woods is undermined for the trees. Our aim is to create a milieu in which corruption shall not be part of Visva-Bharati's history. If the earlier pattern is allowed to continue, it will not be a break with the past but a continuity and only the faces drawing benefits will change. So, it is corruption in substance. When this claim that those

seemingly help the administration function seamlessly need to be given a share of spoils is raised, it comes to my mind immediately that no one does not seem to be keen to permanently weed-out the roots of corruption; but would like to be benefitted as their predecessors did. What is a source of disappointment is the fact that a large section of beneficiaries seems persuaded that corruption cannot be completely rooted out and is a herculean task because it an easy means to gain unlawfully and also easily. It is thus a design for the benefit of those who are reported to have geared the administration to attain their objective leading to benefits to them; The continuity of this systemic design thus supports the contention that by being associated with those capable of wresting benefits in exchange of nothing, gainful achievement can easily be made. The university is for all and needs to be governed by the values Gurudev espoused by dwelling on aspects of human activities complementary to healthy and productive human existence.

### ***Rabindrik?***

Let me begin this section with a disclaimer. The purpose is not to hurt or insult those who are trying to survive by being experts in lip service but to analytically dissect the concept with reference to the prevalent socio-cultural and politico-ideological milieu. I begin with an assumption which may not be liked by these disgruntled individuals who lack their own ability but tend to pursue their exclusive interests by being parasites. THANK GOD! I AM NOT A RABINDRIK! For me, the expression, Rabindrik is a means to attain partisan goals; or, a means to remain socio-politically relevant. I hate being identified as a Rabindrik although before I assumed charges here at Visva-Bharati as its Vice Chancellor, I was happy by being dubbed so. After having spent five long years, I have understood that the expression is conveniently used as a pursuit for goal attainment; Rabindrik is nothing but a well-crafted design of realizing one's essentially personal goals. Hence, I avoid being characterized as a Rabindrik, but a learner by internalizing the values, principles and mores Gurudev Tagore left for posterity.

The pretentious individuals who survive by claiming to be Rabindriks need to be informed of how Santiniketan became a World Heritage Site. It is beyond question that Gurudev Tagore laid the foundation of an ideational vision on which Santiniketan rests and flourishes as a centre of alternative learning and pedagogy. Gurudev Tagore is omniscient and it does not require to be reaffirmed. But the madness of selective Rabindriks have taken the historical Gurudev Tagore to a height without, of course, caring for the values he represented, Gurudev himself would have exclaimed like Karl Marx (who, after having seen individualization of the core conceptual parameters of his ideational universe, mentioned – thank God, I am not A MARXIST!) THANK God, I am not A RABINDRIK!

It is also beyond doubt that Santiniketan of 1921 and Santiniketan of today (2023) are incomparable; it cannot be placed as similar to each other except, of course, the fact that Visva-Bharati draws its sustenance from the core values of universal humanism propounded by Gurudev Tagore. Since 17 September 2023, Santiniketan is now a UNESCO declared World Heritage Site. The process must have started earlier and there were many participants. But it will be unfair not to

declare that the recognition is made possible by the hard work of our hon'ble Chancellor, hon'ble minister of education, hon'ble minister of Culture and the officials in PRIME MINISTER OFFICE, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Culture. Along with them the role of Archeological Survey of India is of immense significance. At Visva-Bharati, my role as its Vice Chancellor and that of my team need to be put on record because without their work in the field, it would have been difficult if not impossible to convince the members of the visiting INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR MONUMENTS AND SITES (ICOMOS) team. Where were those Rabindriks? They were nowhere to be seen. The plaque will be inscribed as per direction of the ASI. The placement of a plaque is necessary to demarcate the area earmarked by the UNESCO as the World Heritage Site. This was necessary to clean the area of Toto drivers who used to park their vehicle haphazardly to create congestion on the road and cause difficulties to the visitors and tourists.

We have no desire to undermine the contribution of any of those who had a role in the attainment of this great recognition. What we need to emphasize is the significant role of those who worked hard since 2019 to showcase Santiniketan to the visiting ICOMOS team. The immense contribution of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore can never be stated in words; he is omnipresent in the site. We owe everything to him. But the fact remains that those who presented SANTINIKETAN before the ICOMOS team to convince that the Site was a potential World Heritage Site undoubtedly played a determining role. Our point is this. For example, can one undermine the significant contribution of Mahatma Gandhi in wresting political emancipation for India although many of his equally competent colleagues joined him in the battle for freedom. Similarly, to draw from a cricket analogy: is this fair to appreciate the greatness of batsmen like Don Bradman, Sachin Tendulkar or Virat Kohli with reference to the failure of bowlers of the period to contain them during the years when they rose to fame in the cricketing world. So, our contention is not to undermine the role of those who endeavoured in the past for this, but also to highlight the unfathomable contribution of those who made this happen in September, 2023. If one ignores this, one deserves to be ignored because this is based on an application of idiocy and frustration of those who are phasing out fast from Visva-Bharati. Being a central university, Visva-Bharati is a source of livelihood for many who would not have survived otherwise. This is an unpalatable truth which many pretend not to accept, showing that they are prejudiced and hence are disinclined to accept the reality.

### **Democratic governance**

During the period between 2019 and 2023, no decision was taken unilaterally. The stakeholders in the university administration are consulted before a decision is taken. But it is unfortunate that Vice Chancellor is always made a scapegoat if something goes wrong. Hence, instead of celebrating the UNESCO recognition of Santiniketan as a World Heritage Site, the detractors became overactive in seeking to rattle the administration (without success, of course) by stooping so low which is unfathomable especially from those who earn their livelihood from this great Institution.

As a large chunk of Visva-Bharati's employees are happy being cherry-picking, they do not bother to strengthen the campaign to get the road passing through the Ashram back to Visva-Bharati. It is wrongly publicized that Visva-Bharati stopped the plying of vehicle and also movement of the people on foot. It is either day-dreaming or the accusation is made to curry favour from the ruling party in the state of West Bengal that has already been crippled with the incarceration of many of its prominent members and its future is uncertain. As there are many instances of corruption being investigated by the concerned agencies, we may see the downfall of more of them.

Santiniketan is a global Heritage; we need to work hard to protect it. If one tends to squeeze this University for personal gain, I am not sure whether this is a good effort on the part of those who defend their illegal activities purportedly to carry on the so-called Rabindrik tradition.

One of the areas that attracted attention in Visva-Bharati's past dispensation was recruitment to teaching and non-teaching staff. Many illegal appointments were made and the earlier administration was under the scanner of CAG. The new recruits are not free from being identified as one of those who were recruited illegally. As regards appointment in the non-teaching position, generally, the inbreeding was the rule and no outsider was generally allowed to work in the administration. To avoid this, for recruitment in the teaching position, the experts are chosen from the institutions/universities who have established themselves in their respective fields. For recruitment to non-teaching posts, Visva-Bharati is one of rare central universities in the country which recruited employees with the help of a national organization, the National Testing Agency. With fifty-seven centres in various parts of the country, Visva-Bharati received candidates from all over the country. Visva-Bharati has progressed to become a national university although the detractors were not happy because such a process of recruitment deprived them to get people as employees through ways which are anything but fair. This is also a questioning of the system that so far prevailed in the campus as regards recruitment: there is a common saying that Visva-Bharati is a space which allows individuals to grow from KG to PG which, I thought, meant that the institution was a mechanism to allow learners to study from Kindergarten to Post-Graduate courses. Later on, in view of mass inbreeding, I was informed that this saying is an acronym for individuals who began their life as a Kindergarten student ended with an employee entitled to get PENSION AND GRATUITY (PG). There are reasons to believe in this assumption although there are exceptions to this rule. The decision to get the test for recruitment done by the NTA was governed, to a significant extent, to reverse the seemingly well-established (may have been wrongly construed) form of recruitment.

In this connection, the role of the so-called *Budhijivi* (rough translation is intellectuals) of West Bengal needs to be recorded. It is true that some of the *Buddhijivis* who are now pampered by the incumbent state government have charted a different course of action for themselves for reasons which do not require to be spelt-out. When Visva-Bharati plunged into action for recovering

illegally-occupied land by the leaseholders, a select group of *Buddhijivis* descended in Santiniketan to campaign against Visva-Bharati's planned design to recover illegally occupied leasehold land. We were happy that despite having collected many known individuals who excelled in their field of expertise, the presence of Visva-Bharati's employees and students was negligible. This is a matter of great joy because now the stakeholders of Visva-Bharati have realized that they need to protect this monument by raising their voice and also showing solidarity for a cause. It is also a matter of great happiness that the employees and students seem to have internalized their responsibilities to this World Heritage Site.

The steps adopted by the present administration amidst the well-planned endeavours by many who are involved in decimating the Rabindrik traditions (in its real connotation) corresponds with what Gurudev Tagore apprehended in his letter to Mahatma Gandhi on 2 February, 1940. Being upset by the behaviour of many of his colleagues, he thus requested Gandhi to ensure permanence to Visva-Bharati "if [he] consider[s] it to be a national asset. Visva-Bharati is like a vessel which is carrying the cargo of my [Tagore's] life's best treasure and [he] hope[s] [that] it may claim special care from [his] countrymen for its preservation". It does not appear strange because those who busked under the glory of Gurudev Tagore and became worthwhile as human beings felt threatened because Gurudev's empowering ideas also led to the consolidation of an ideational vision strong enough to successfully combat those seeking to fulfil their self-driven partisan goals and objectives. The traditions appear to continue for even after the elapse of more than eight decades since the demise of Gurudev Tagore, one confronts more or less identical circumstances. The detractors have already taken out their fangs to harm those who are discharging their duties conscientiously as they are those few who are steadfastly committed to the protection of this great site. Visva-Bharati owes a great deal to them. In fact, it will not be an exaggeration to claim that without their hard work, Visva-Bharati would not have remained where it is now. The battle between them and their megalomaniac detractors was there when Gurudev was there on the scene and continues to spend time on futile activities instead of being involved in research or creative and citable writings which will help Visva-Bharati to become a Visva Guru espoused by our hon'ble Chancellor, Sri Narendra Modiji. So, those who enjoy defaming Visva-Bharati are severely weakened if not jeopardized with the adoption of corrective measures generating frustration among the detractors for being irrelevant in the entire cosmos, unfortunately.

### **A Wider Issue**

As a student of Social Sciences, it is incumbent on me to participate in the debate which will remain inconclusive given its nature. Here, my intervention is that of an academic who wrote a book in collaboration with a student of mine entitled *Hindu Nationalism in India* (Routledge, 2020). Our aim is to understand the expression Hindutva in its wider ramification and also with reference to etymological and epistemological roots which are required to be understood contextually. The main argument of the book may be at variance with many of a-historical conceptualization of the terms which are in vogue presumably to defend a partisan point of view although we are always ready to take part in a well-informed debate on this theme. We are those

intellectuals who are determined to fathom a concept with reference to the historical milieu and shall never allow ourselves to be swayed by what is fashionable in a context. We cannot be Valentine Chirol who wrote *Indian Unrest* (London, 1910) to equate the revolutionary nationalist acts with terrorism to curry favour with the then British rule. There are many who expressed that Hindutva was a divisive design as it was wrongly (and also deliberately) conceived by them to pursue specific politico-ideological aims. It is difficult to deal with the argument in detail in this missive. However, we dealt with possible critique in our book as elaborately as possible. There are two fundamental points that need to be considered to take a position vis-à-vis Hindutva: first, it is a politico-ideological conceptualization in a context in which it did not seem to be incongruent with the prevalent socio-economic environment and politico-cultural thinking. It was not, at all, divisive as is conceived by many; it was a critique of ‘a distorted version’ of the conceptualization which was context-driven. Secondly, Hindutva appears to be an effective means to consolidate the nation in India which is beyond comprehension had this been understood in the Western paradigm; the idea of civilizational compatibility is alien to the Western historical experiences. Hence, it is simply myopic to conceptualize nation in the Western context in the Indian theoretical mould. The idea of *Bharat* approximates to the notion of civilizational unity which is a cementing factor in bringing the socio-culturally diverse section of humanity together as One Collective, of course, in a differently textured conceptual sense.

### ***Hindutva: a misconstrued notion?***

Nowadays, most of the intellectuals and those who have interests in what is happening in India appear to have been terribly disturbed with the increasing ideological plausibility of *Hindutva*. Based on the assumption that *Hindutva* is a conceptual design of homogenization, they apprehend that India is probably heading towards being Israel or Pakistan. The idea of Hindu Pakistan is thus not just a conceptual construction, but one that creates a solid foundation for India which will force her to emerge as one unit discarding her disparate socio-cultural texture. The apprehension is based on the assumption that the target are Muslims since their *punyabhumi* is not India but Mecca. Theoretically, the assumption is correct since VD Savarkar in his 1923 text, *Hindutva*, emphasized this aspect to bolster his point in favour of the consolidation of Hindus vis-à-vis Muslims. The point is reinforced vigorously by MS Golwalkar who in his *We or Our Nationhood Defined* (1939) by describing India as a Hindu nation provided theoretical justifications to the argument. There is no disagreement as both Savarkar and Golwalkar viewed India as a country for an exclusive religious group. The point needs to be understood contextually. When Savarkar made his point in colonial India, Muslims were already an organized force seeking to carve an independent space in the struggle for establishing their independent identity. Most of them holding views contrary to those of the Indian National Congress preferred to be aligned with the Muslim League that came into being in 1906. By the 1920s, the League grew in importance particularly in Bengal and Punjab and had a national presence as a powerful lobby for the Muslims to place their exclusive demands before the authority. The politico-ideological scene became complex as the rulers also sided with the Muslims which was an obvious outcome of the policy of *divide-et-impera*

pursued by them. By 1939 when MS Golwalkar appeared on the scene, the demand for Pakistan was in the air and soon to be institutionalized with the adoption of the 1940 Lahore Resolution. No analyst can ignore the contextual inputs which acted critically in the shaping of the views of Savarkar and Golwalkar. In other words, their responses were a counter to the politico-ideological design supportive of Muslims being socio-culturally different to bolster their claim for a separate homeland which meant India's partition. With India's division in 1947 on the basis of MA Jinnah "two-nation theory", it can be stated that both Savarkar and Golwalkar perhaps had the foresight to analyze the historical forces and accordingly they devised their ideational vision.

It does not require a depth of mind that pre-independent India and India that emerged after independence are two different entities in all respects. The fact that many Muslims remained in independent India also demonstrates that they were not persuaded by Jinnah's divisive design. It is also a fact that Muslims constituted nearly fourteen percent of India's demography whereas the proportion of Hindus vis-à-vis the total population has gone down noticeably in Pakistan and Bangladesh. The moot point here that Muslims are as critical to India's identity as a nation state as their Hindu counterparts. In view of this contention, it is surprising when many of the commentators compare India with Israel, especially after the recent outbreak of the war between Hamas and Israel. The argument that the current political dispensation is in favour of creating a Hindu homeland just like Israel as a Jewish homeland by being proud of their commitment to their religious inclinations. Here is a serious faultline in the argument since by putting India and Israel as complementary to each other because independent India has hardly taken any of the steps that are associated with the forcible transformation of the country into a Hindu homeland. It is true that discriminatory constitutional provisions tilted in favour of one community deterred the rise of India as one country and hence they should be discarded. It is crystal clear that these exclusive facilities are allowed to continue because none of the political parties dared to touch them as this was likely to adversely affect their vote bank and Muslim support *enmasse* was critical to their victory in polls. Zakir Hussain, one of the leading Congressmen who was also India's President thus expressed his doubt when India was declared a secular state saying that why a Muslim candidate was chosen for a Muslim-preponderant constituency and why, for Aligarh Muslim University, a Vice Chancellor's religious identity as a Muslim mattered most. As history shows, neither Banaras Hindu University nor Aligarh Muslim University has ever got a Muslim and Hindu Vice Chancellor respectively.

Given the ingrained limitation of articulation of *Hindutva* without reference to the contextual milieu, it is logically myopic to pursue the argument that it was a conceptualization of privileging an exclusive political vision. A prejudicial mindset will, of course, lead to the misinterpretation of *Hindutva*. As many of the ideologues of contemporary *Hindutva* have clearly mentioned that Savarkar and Golwalkar's *Hindutva* is no longer as pertinent as it was in the past. India is a collection of communities linked with one another by civilizational compatibility which further reiterates that the Islamic civilizational values are as critical as those of India's ancient ideational

preferences. India is a composite nation and Muslims are integral to India. Given independent India's long history as a composite collective for more than seven decades, it is simply inconceivable to suggest that India is Hinduized. Because transmogrification of India as a Hindu Pakistan is not an easy task in view of the well-entrenched socio-cultural bond among the religiously different communities, the argument that *Hindutva* will succeed and India will become a religious state is neither valid nor has any substance. Instead of completely dismissing *Hindutva* as an ideational mode, what is judicious is to analytically dissect its inner kernel to understand why it was a means to dissociate the "religious other" before independence, and, also why the argument is futile now. *Hindutva* has undoubtedly gained momentum with the assumption of power by the Bharatiya Janata Party. What is however missing is the critical importance of a sizeable number of Muslims in India who can never be ignored so long as first-past-the-post system of voting continues. Muslims just like their Hindu counterparts cannot therefore be ignored given their visible political importance in contemporary India.

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