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# *WORLD PATH TO DEMOCRACY*

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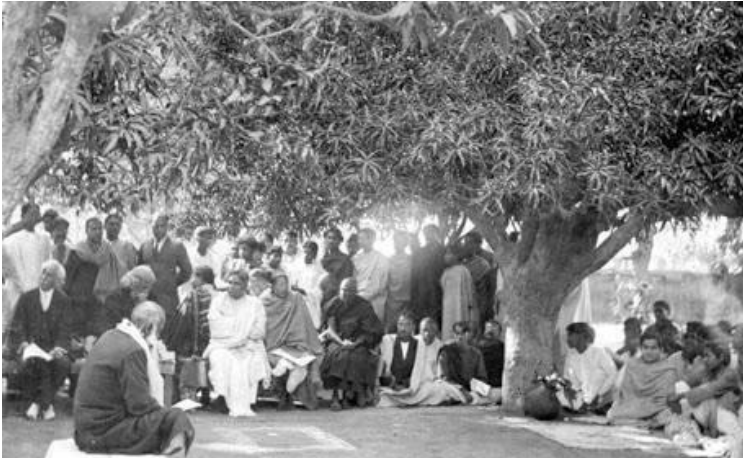
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# The Visvabharati Ideal and Divine Humanity

**Archishman Raju**



Visvabharati was officially founded as a university in 1921 just as the Western world order was emerging from a major crisis: the first world war and the Indian freedom struggle was taking a mass form. The objects of the university were declared in its founding constitution. The first four objectives were

(i) to study the mind of Man in its realisation of different aspects of truth from diverse points of

view;

(ii) to bring into more intimate relations with one another, through patient study and research, the different cultures of the East on the basis of their underlying unity;

(iii) to approach the West from the standpoint of such a unity of the life and thought of Asia

(iv) to seek to realise in a common fellowship of study the meeting of the East and the West, and

thus ultimately to strengthen the fundamental conditions of world peace through the establishment of free communication of ideas between the two hemispheres;

Visvabharati's founding objective made it more than just a university, its significance is not confined to its institutional boundaries. Visvabharati is a school of thought, an ideal that requires continuing interpretation and striving. My aim here is to interpret the Visvabharati ideal in the context of our current world situation and Tagore's philosophy. The third objective of Visvabharati, "to approach the West from the standpoint" of "unity of the life and thought of Asia" represents an epistemic break in social scientific work that carries immense relevance in our time.

The first part of the Visvabharati Ideal was to study the mind of Man. How was Man to know Man? Tagore approached the question of knowledge of humanity not from a positivist perspective, but from the standpoint of the divinity of humanity. In his later lectures on *The Religion of Man*, he wrote "The idea of the humanity of our God, or the divinity of Man the Eternal, is the main subject of this book." The divinity of humanity was visible in the songs of the Baul and poets like Dadu and Kabir, both of which traditions were studied in Visvabharati. Human beings had contradictions within their nature and goodness and truth were represented in those aspects that were divine. Therefore, when individual men realized a truth greater than

themselves, they were reflecting Man the divine. Tagore believed that knowledge of this divine aspect of humanity required love.

As Tagore wrote in *Sadhana*, “Essentially man is not a slave either of himself or of the world; but he is a lover. His freedom and fulfilment is in love, which is another name for perfect comprehension”. The knowledge of humanity was not to be an impersonal knowledge, but a knowledge rooted in love. It would be a knowledge that did not seek freedom from humanity, but freedom in union with humanity.

This freedom would not come from mere intellectual pursuit. As Tagore said, “It is the duty of every human being to master, at least to some extent, not only the language of intellect, but also that personality which is the language of Art” Music and Art would play an important role in the education of and creation unity of humanity. Finally, such knowledge must be based in “the life-current of the people”. This was the reason that Tagore wanted to establish Visvabharati not in a major Indian city, but in a rural setting.

The second part of the Visvabharati ideal was to bring together the different cultures of the East. To understand this ideal, one must understand Tagore’s philosophy of history, which drew from the Indian historical experience. As Uma Dasgupta writes, Tagore viewed India as a social civilization. Tagore argued in his essay on Indian history written in 1903

“What is the chief significance of Bharatavarsha? If a precise answer to this question is sought, the answer is available. And the history of Bharatavarsha upholds that answer. We find that a single objective has always been motivating Bharatavarsha. This objective has been to establish unity among diversity, to make various paths move towards one goal, to experience the One-in-many as the innermost reality, to pursue with total certitude that supreme principle of inner unity that runs through the differences. It has also been her endeavour to achieve these without destroying the distinctions that appear in the external world. The ability to perceive this oneness in diversity and to strive to extend unity are the native characteristics of Bharatavarsha.”

In this sense, the second ideal attempted to concretely pursue the historical legacy of our civilization. In the second issue of *Visvabharati Quarterly*, Tagore wrote on “The Way to Unity”. The modern world would require a reworking of this historical legacy of Indian civilization. Technological changes have made the world a much smaller place (more so today than a century ago when Tagore was writing). The challenge was, as Tagore put it, “the more the doors are opening and the walls breaking down outwardly, the greater is the force which the consciousness of individual distinction is gaining within” Tagore wrote that “Individuality is precious, because only through it we can realise the universal”. Rather than suppressing individual personality and subsuming it within a collective identity, the way to unity was for individual personality to expand outward and unite with humanity through sacrifice. This was the great objective of Indian civilization.

Kalidas Bhattacharya, writing on the construction of a systematic philosophy of history from the ideas of Gandhi and Tagore, wrote that such a philosophy would view History as “a study of the continuous process of re-creation of systematic unity through loving conquest of alienations”. This view of history is central to understanding the Visvabharati ideals.

Writing on the concept of an “Eastern University”, Tagore wrote “in our centre of Indian learning, we must provide for the co-ordinate study of all these different cultures,—the Vedic, the Puranic, the Buddhist, the Jain, the Islam, the Sikh and the Zoroastrian. The Chinese, Japanese and Tibetan will also have to be added” Tagore believed that assimilating the civilizational inheritance of Asia would be a necessary step to understanding the West.

Tagore was a pioneer of a new kind of Pan-Asian movement. He was foresighted in opening the Cheena Bhavan along with Tan Yun Shan as he understood that India and China would need sources of communication and understanding. When Kalidas Nag, who also accompanied Tagore on his trip to China in 1924, attended the inter-Asian relations conference organized in 1947, he wrote that Tagore was acknowledged not only as a literary giant but also acknowledged as a “pioneer in reviving inter-Asian relations in modern times”.

The third ideal was radical and harder to understand. Writing on modernity, the Japanese intellectual Takeuchi Yoshimi interpreted the concept of an *Asian* view as a method for Asia’s self-formation. Yoshimi asked why Japanese modernization had always been compared to Western modernization, rather than with Chinese or Indian modernization. Further, he argued that Japan and China were representative of different types of modernization. Interestingly, Yoshimi relied on Tagore to bring out this difference. Yoshimi wrote “Tagore was regarded in Japan as a poet of a ruined nation...But in China he was seen as a champion for the cause of national emancipation. These different readings pose a problem for us.” The resolution was for Asia to consider its own experiences and, for Tagore, it could only begin to assimilate the Western contribution to humanity after it had done so.

The Visvabharati ideal suggested not only that Asian cultures should study each other, but furthermore that they should not evaluate themselves vis-a-vis the West, but rather evaluate the West vis-a-vis themselves. This first required a synthesis of the core values of Asian civilizations and Tagore believed such a synthesis has its basis in a shared historical and civilizational experience. Indian modernity, for example, is usually often discussed in its distinction from Western modernity, but almost never in comparison to Chinese modernity. This intercivilizational dialogue in Asia is an essential part of understanding Asian modernity, and more broadly, colored modernity so Asia’s rise can be self-conscious rather than imitative. It is only then that the fourth Visvabharati ideal, that of world peace, can be realized.

The conversation on the rise of Asia in our time is primarily dominated by the *economic* rise of Asia. Whereas Asia contributed a mere 15% share of the world GDP in 1970 (with Europe and North America having about 76%), its share now has risen to more than 38% with the number even higher when taken in terms of PPP. World economic growth is primarily driven by the rise of Asia. Within Asia, the rise of China has been most spectacular and China, an Asian country,

is nowadays referred to as “a great power” because of its economic, military and geopolitical strength. Currently, India has some of the highest economic growth rates in Asia and India is expected to become a leading economic power in the next two decades. There is also the *geopolitical* rise of Asia or the growth in the relative strength of Asian nation states and their ability to change global institutions.

However, more important than this is the *human* rise of Asia. Life expectancy in China has risen from 61 to 79 in the past 50 years and from 51 to 71 in India in the same period. There has been a fall in poverty led by China’s elimination of extreme poverty and a fall in infant mortality all over Asia. In general, there are many more people in Asia who now have a chance at life and potentiality to contribute to the world.

As humanity in Asia rises, its consciousness will seek to shape the world. Unfortunately, the intellectual discourse in India does not reflect this. It continues to talk about the changing world order primarily through narrow strategic objectives. These objectives are understood now in realist and pragmatic terms, decrying the supposed idealism of the past. They attempt to imitate and modify Western institutions rather than breaking from them. Yet, for all its boasts on the supposed superiority of a Western style pragmatic nation state, India’s recent foreign policy has been a visible failure. It has ignored India’s history and its civilizational legacy. At the dawn of independence, India led colored modernity through the inter-Asian relations conference, the Bandung conference, the Panchsheel principles, institutes of Asian and African relations and movements for world peace. Today, our misleadership stands stand mute in the face of genocide and oppression. The people must turn back to our civilizational legacy to shape our relationship to humanity.

Rather than imitating Western style think tanks which offer the cold logic of imperialism, the Visvabharati ideal asks us to consider institutes of peace and intercivilizational dialogue, to be able to truly construct a society where divine humanity has its rightful place.

*Archishman Raju is editor of this journal.*

# America, India, Bangladesh and the Weaponization of Whiteness

**Nandita Chaturvedi**

We in India stand at a new crossroads. We are part of the broader movement throughout Asia of greater democratic possibilities as more of our people emerge from the dark dungeons of illiteracy and poverty. Today we are asking as a nation, who will we be? Our history is being brought into question, and ideas that held a sacred place in our national discourse, such as satyagraha and non-alignment, are being questioned and re-examined. This is of course a necessary process, and every people must undertake the task of reassessing their history. Yet, this process needs intellectuals who are in democratic and close dialogue with the nation's people.

We are faced today with the presence of a middle and upper middle class who aspire to the West. This group was first intentionally manufactured to provide clerks and lawyers for the British during colonialism, responsible for ruling on behalf of the British empire as half-white men. The Indian freedom movement challenged the middle classes to examine their own people and history, and side with the tide of resistance against the British. It is then that several who were trained by the British committed class and race suicide to join and lead the freedom movement. A large section of them later joined the project of nation building under Nehru's leadership.

The next generation would lose their ideological and moral moorings and be unable to respond as our nation faced a crisis of leadership after the assassination of Indira Gandhi and, eventually, the opening up of the economy to foreign investment and the nation to Western ideas. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, this class has grown and amassed unprecedented wealth as the financial reforms benefitted them over all other sections of Indian society. They now have access to Western goods in Indian markets, and overwhelmingly send their children to either the US or Europe for education. Several of them work for international companies, and perhaps a majority of them have a family member who lives in the US. What has happened is the creation of a class of people who are aspirational to whiteness, want to escape the nations where they live and believe in the white images projected to the world through mass media, Instagram and Facebook.

Our middle classes have, then, a *double consciousness*. They see their people and themselves through two vantage points, one of the Indian freedom struggle, and the other of the white world. Each successive generation has lost its anchoring in the Indian and Nehruvian traditions, becoming more and more white in their world view. They are now isolated from the majority of their countrymen, in contrast to earlier times when the elite was intricately connected to the aspirations of ordinary people. The urban upper middle classes have been consumed by universal selfishness, and have no sense of their responsibility to their nations. This is easily

seen in their call for a new 'non-aligned movement' based on pragmatism that would align India with Europe and Japan. Even in the midst of an anti-American wave they see their kin in Europe, for they are white in their self conceptualization. This grouping shows a complete lack of historical, principled or even practical thinking.

On the other hand, the creation of this class has been possible only because of the unprecedented success Indians have had as an immigrant group in the United States. Built initially on the gains of the civil rights and African American freedom movement, the acceptance of Indians in positions of economic and even political strength is second perhaps only to the Jews in America. The Indian Americans wield a disproportionate influence on the Indian mind, culture and even economy. Their visibility has led the middle class youth within India to believe that paradise awaits at the end of immigration in the form of an American corporate job, unimaginable material success and a cultural community of Indians. They have shown the world that a narrow cultural nationalism for Indian civilization is indeed compatible and maybe even complementary with becoming white.

All of this, and their acceptance into the American racial hierarchy has made Indian Americans, specially first generation, decadent and flabby. They believed that the American dream would last forever, and the message for Indians was that there would always be a place for them in the white world order. Yet, all of this was constructed on the older neo-liberal assumptions of the American world order which are now falling away with Trump. We are now seeing the assumptions behind the veneer of Obama and Biden as the American empire turns on itself. A recent New York Times article showed the confusion among Indians trying to immigrate to the United States. Several of the people interviewed in the article claimed to have "worked hard" to get where they were, and that they deserved a job from American companies. This belief, in the context of a nation where the African American experience shows that wealth and upward social mobility is not the result of 'hard work', betrays a sense of entitlement never before seen among Indians. We should welcome seeing the truth of whiteness rather than retreat into cowardice at having the illusion of a benevolent America taken from us. Middle class Indian youth have a conceptualization of their path towards whiteness, which will continue to break down. An alternative sense of self is needed.

Middle class youth in India are uneducated in their own history of struggle, and do not know what has produced them. They do not know how their education and financial prosperity has been built up on the sacrifice and struggle of their people, and in particular how they have reaped the benefits of the Nehruvian state in their education and employment. Instead, they are guided by sentiments that align well with the American liberal intelligentsia. They uphold abstract notions of 'democracy' which to them signifies the freedom to do as they please and have access to the products of American capitalism. Ironically, the BJP government, which is, on the surface, critical of liberal cultural norms has facilitated this by attempting to come closer to the US both economically and culturally.

To some this article may read as an angry tirade against our middle classes. Yet, a national assessment is necessary. The events in Bangladesh, Venezuela and Iran hold a warning for us.

Bangladesh specially showed that a westward facing youth population, unaware of its own history can be easily manipulated to go against their governments. Facilitated by social media companies, known to work in the interests of American intelligence, protests of thousands can be organized overnight. These protests have no clear leadership, and appear 'spontaneous'. In Bangladesh, youth burned down Sheikh Mujibur's house, maybe unaware that they were actively facilitating the Western takeover of their self determination. Some entered Hasina's bedroom and put on her clothes, partaking in the Western denigration and humiliation of their own people and the legacy of their freedom movement. While the concerns that initiated the protests may have legitimacy, their evaluation becomes impossible in the face of a coup d'etat.

In Iran, several thousands of protesters and hundreds, possibly thousands of security personnel have been killed in protests against the government. While the protests were initially addressing an economy made weak by Western sanctions, this turn to violence is worrying for the stability of the Iranian state. There is nothing that Israel and the American ruling elite would like more than to have a destabilized Iran descend into chaos. Israeli and American politicians have openly announced that Mossad agents are among the protesters inciting violence. Are all the violent elements in the protests direct agents, or could some of them be useful idiots? We cannot clearly know for certain, but the ideological infiltration of Iranian society by liberal Western ideas definitely opens up that possibility. This has, again, been made possible by the Iranian Americans lobbying for the West's involvement in Iran. Lastly, Maduro's capture from a Venezuelan security facility could not have been possible without deep infiltration of its state and government by the CIA.

Infiltration is a time tested tool of the American empire, but in our times it has been perfected to be even more subtle. You need not pay people to become CIA agents any longer, all that is needed is the cultural and ideological conditioning of a national elite to believe in whiteness. All that is Western must appear to be good. A kind of desperation and suicidal tendency among the elite then makes possible the orchestration of anti-government movements. The lack of clarity on what will take its place once the state and government falls makes it easy for American backed forces to fill in the void and undo the gains of the anticolonial struggles fought the world over.

The Modi government's actions show that they do not think this process can ever take place in India. They are trying to ride two horses going in opposite directions -- claiming to be pragmatically for their own 'national interest' while avoiding any confrontation with the West. Even in a time when Trump's actions leave no room for vacillation, they have not made any statements defending self determination or national sovereignty in the case of Palestine, Venezuela, Iran or Bangladesh. We are left with no friends on the world stage as we try to play both sides on all world issues. We cannot afford to be cowardly in this time of global change.

We in India need to understand that, seen without its clothing of liberal multiculturalism, the white ruling elite of America consider the darker world subhuman. At best they tolerate your participation in their world system to ensure its stability, an exchange is now crumbling as they lose the support of the American people. No amount of appeasement will get you unconditional

support from the American elite, who cares only for its own survival. For the American elite, even a world destroyed by nuclear war is better than a world without them at its center. India's strength lies in a principled foreign policy whose template was set by the non-aligned movement. The non-aligned movement was an extension of our freedom struggle and drew upon the Gandhian ideal of satyagraha. We need to go back to the principled positions on world events taken on by Nehru and Indira Gandhi. We must recognize the ways in which Indira Gandhi extended the policy of non-alignment with the Indo-Soviet treaty, her involvement in Bangladesh and her close friendship with the leaders of Afro-Asia. We in India have something to defend: a tradition of fighting for human freedom, and struggling to uphold the human and civilizational principles of peace, truth and justice.

*Nandita Chaturvedi is editor of this journal.*

# Nicolas Maduro and the Bolivarian Revolution

**Meghna Chandra**



In the early hours of January 3rd, 2026, the United States government abducted the democratically elected leader of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Nicolas Maduro, and his wife, Cilia Flores. Later that morning, the White House Twitter posted a video of Maduro blindfolded, ears plugged, handcuffed. In the background, Notorious B.I.G.'s "Hypnotize" loops, and Trump struts down a White House Corridor, smirking.

The White House believes they signal the United States' strength and virility. Like rapists, they believe that the ability to steal through violence shows power.

James Baldwin diagnosed what we are witnessing as sexual psychosis. White American masculinity manifests as violence and domination, masking deep insecurity.<sup>1</sup> Trump's abduction of Maduro does not show the Empire's strength, but its profound weakness and existential terror.

The United States empire has many reasons to be afraid. The world is profoundly different from the one in which the Monroe Doctrine operated in the 19th and 20th centuries. Internally, the country is on the brink of civil war, with the ongoing violence in America's cities between Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents and protestors. After decades of deindustrialization, austerity, and war, the American public no longer believes in American institutions. The ruling elite have failed to build consensus for war and empire among the American people.

Internationally BRICS nations led by India, Russia and China have increased their share of the world economy to over 40%. China has lifted its masses out of poverty without slavery and genocide, and every day surpasses the West with technological, economic, and social advances. BRICS institutions offer a hope of participatory democracy and a multipolar world, a true alternative to neocolonial domination.

Most importantly, nobody, domestically or internationally, believes that the capture of Maduro has anything to do with narco terrorism. Everyone knows it has everything to do with control

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<https://challengingmalesupremacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Here-be-Dragons-James-Baldwin.pdf>

over Venezuela's massive oil reserves. As Maduro said in an interview with the former President of Ecuador last September, "They cannot say that Maduro has weapons of mass destruction [as they did with Saddam Hussein]... Nobody would believe them. So they bring out Hollywood style narratives where Maduro is the bad guy of the movie and the good guys are them. Then they are going to send in their army. The fair skinned, blonde, strapping good guys, come to find the Latino, the bad guy. But the truth of the movie, people know, is that... the bad guy is the one who writes the script..."<sup>2</sup>

## **Hugo Chavez and the Significance of the Bolivarian Revolution**

Maduro is the successor to the Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement, a process started by Hugo Chavez in 1999. Hugo Chavez was born in 1954 and grew up in a poor family of African, Indigenous, and European descent. He joined the military at age 17 and became conscious of the army's oppression of the Venezuelan masses and the corruption of the two party system. In 1989, he vowed never to turn his guns on his own people after the country's ruling elite deployed him to shoot civilians protesting IMF shock therapy. Chavez led a coup attempt in 1992, after which he was imprisoned for two years. While in prison he studied history and philosophy, especially the works of Simon Bolivar and Fidel Castro. He also studied the French Revolution's ideal of revolutionary constituent power, and became convinced that Venezuela must evolve its democracy. He emerged from prison with a clear sense of ideology, history, and human nature.

Chavez launched the Fifth Republic movement in July 1997 and ran for president in 1998. He ran on a platform of redistribution and participatory democracy. Despite being silenced on TV, radio, and print media, Chavez and his party won in a landslide with overwhelming support from the poor, who were 80% of the population. The Fifth Republic Movement ratified a new constitution in 1999. This new constitution guaranteed the right to life, work, learning, education, social justice and equality. It enshrined free education, free health care, access to a clean environment, rights of minorities, and more. It introduced mechanisms for participatory democracy including referenda to recall elected officials and repeal laws, citizen initiatives to propose new legislation, and public consultations.<sup>3</sup> As Chavez said, "This project of transformation means that, little by little, people who have been excluded will have access to posts and become empowered. This is true democracy, extending far beyond formal political democracy that limits choice to whether or not a particular governor should be elected."<sup>4</sup>

Much to the horror of the West, the new constitution affirmed state sovereignty over national resources. The government halted the privatization of PDVSA, the nation's oil industry, and directed its revenue to social welfare. With the help of the Cuban government, the Revolutionary government implemented Bolivarian Missions to expand access to food, housing, healthcare, and education. Chavez's government banned enrollment fees and shoes as a requirement to enter public schools. Hundreds of thousands of children turned up for school and the army

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8drPKkt5wg&t=1s>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Venezuela\\_2009](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Venezuela_2009)

<sup>4</sup> Chávez, *Venezuela and the New Latin America: An Interview with Hugo Chávez*, p 49

repurposed its barracks for their education. Chavez implemented Plan Bolivar to turn the Constitutional Army into a people's army. Soldiers went to the country's poorest sectors to repair food, build local markets, and provide food.

Beyond a new form of government, the people participating in the Bolivarian revolution gained a new sense of self. The Fifth Republic Movement gave the Venezuelan people a pride in their shared history and humanity. In a country dominated by a white skinned elite, Chavez proudly pointed out his African and Indigenous features. He recognized the elite's hatred towards him as racist anger that someone with his curly hair and large lips dared assume the reins of history. Chavez identified Venezuela with the Bandung spirit of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, rather than with Spain and the United States.<sup>5</sup>

Chavez was inspired by the Cuban Revolution and mentored by Fidel Castro, whom he said was like a father and a brother to him. Chavez and Fidel established a relationship of warmth and fraternity among the two nations. Cuban doctors, nurses, and teachers contributed to the Fifth Republic Movement's welfare programs. Chavez defended Cuba and Fidel at the Summit of the Americas and refused Washington's directives to isolate Cuba. The imperialist media tried to smear Chavez by disseminating stories about his relationship with Fidel, but it only made him more popular.

The country's ruling elite had enough. On April 11, 2002, with the blessings of the Bush administration, opposition politicians called for a march on Miraflores Palace. The elite-owned media broadcast propaganda that the government and Chavez supporters shot at marchers, when the opposite was true. The military high command demanded Chavez's resignation, which he refused to give. The coup government arrested Chavez and took him to an undisclosed location.

The Venezuelan people stopped the coup in its tracks within days. The people of Caracas mobilized on the streets in protest of the unconstitutional and illegal takeover. The palace guards recaptured the building and reinstated Chavez's ministers. Rank and file soldiers found out Chavez's location and brought him back as a hero.

The extreme right wing tried to destabilize the Bolivarian Movement through oil strikes, recall referendums, and propaganda. Chavez fought back through his program on state owned media "Alo Presidente" in which he addressed the nation, defended the revolution, and gave people a chance to call in and speak to him directly.<sup>6</sup> The Bolivarian Movement endures through Chavez's suspicious death in 2013.<sup>7</sup>

The Bolivarian Movement's significance is that it is at the vanguard of the current world order. Twenty five years before the BRICS Kazan declaration, it rejected the idea that a nation must submit to the Western model of privatization, austerity, and debt. It centered the poor and

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<sup>5</sup> <https://x.com/HornLeftists/status/1789021776569151613>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wF\\_5xZlstPw&t=2s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wF_5xZlstPw&t=2s)

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/Perspectives\\_1/article\\_9681.shtml](https://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/Perspectives_1/article_9681.shtml)

marginalized in the fight for development and against neocolonialism. It transcended Western liberal democracy through new forms of participatory rule. It defeated a white, western-trained, technocratic upper class. It promoted a new world order based on sovereignty and respect for all peoples.

### **Maduro Inherits the Revolution**

Nicolas Maduro Moros, a busdriver and trade unionist, inherited the Fifth Republic Movement. Maduro continued Chavez's legacy of uncompromising truth telling. He strengthened principled ties with China, Russia and Iran. He fought gangs and drug trafficking that the US DEA claims to be concerned about. In his last interview before his abduction, he explained that he sees himself not as a sole decision maker, but an interpreter of popular power.<sup>8</sup>

Maduro is one of the most courageous voices of the multipolar world. At the 2024 BRICS summit, he proposed bold measures for global economic and political reform. He called for a new international monetary system through the BRICS Development Bank and a basket of currencies to end American dollar hegemony. Maduro made a clear and undeniable case that Zionism and Imperialism undermine humanity's aspiration for a peaceful world order. He recognized the impotence and obsolescence of the current UN system which had failed to protect the people of Gaza, and envisioned a new system arising from the multipolar world. In his words:

“...everytime a precision missile falls on a residential building in Gaza and kills men, women, and children, every time a missile falls on Beirut or on Southern Lebanon those missiles set fire to the UN system and destroy it. Where is the UN International Criminal Court or was it created only to persecute the countries of the Global South? Where is the UN justice system? Only to prepare documents, communiques? Are the lives of Palestinian children worthless? Let us be loud. Let us seek a practical, audacious plan to revitalize the UN system which is in agony in the face of the rise of the Nazi and fascist movements at this painful stage in history. A new world is possible. We believe that a new world is already emerging. BRICS is the epicenter of the birth and historical emergence of this new world. A world with deeply human values and principles.”<sup>9</sup>

Finally, Maduro prophesied that the US empire's response to the economic, military, technological, scientific, and cultural rise of the Global South would be war. This war would be waged to force American political, economic, cultural, and military hegemony on the world. Maduro said that in fact, World War III has already begun.<sup>10</sup>

### **Faith in the Future and Freedom from Fear**

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5smQORIDb9o>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWs2kpS4PGU>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8drPKkt5wg&t=10m45s>

This abduction of Maduro, among other events, has shattered all illusions of international law and the so-called rules based order. Even white countries who prospered under Pax Americana know the game is up. As Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said recently, “If great powers abandon even the pretense of rules and values for the unhindered pursuit of their power and interests, the gains from transactionalism will become harder to replicate.”<sup>11</sup>

Now that the mirror of white supremacy has cracked and no one, any longer, anywhere, aspires to the empire’s standards, the last weapon of the American Empire is violence and fear. How the world responds to these tactics will decide the future.

Cuba provides an example. Thirty two Cubans, members of Maduro’s personal security detail, died alongside dozens of Venezuelans in the attack against Maduro and Venezuela. They came to Venezuela inspired by friendship, solidarity, and cooperation for a united America in the spirit of Simon Bolivar and Jose Marti. They persisted under bullets and enemy drones and against soldiers overprotected by planes, helicopters, and intentional blackouts. In light of this attack and Trump’s threats, the Cuban people have vowed that they will stay united. Instead of running from aggression, they will meet it head on. As Cuban President Miguel Diaz Canal said, “They would have to kidnap millions or wipe us off the map, and even then, the ghost of this small archipelago, which they had to pulverize because they couldn’t subdue it, would haunt them forever. No, imperialists, we are not afraid of you at all. And, as Fidel said, we don’t like being threatened. You will not intimidate us.”<sup>12</sup>

The multipolar order stands upon the shoulders of the individuals and nations who refused to be afraid. Their sacrifices made democracy real because they proved that the darker nations would not consent to be slaves. They forged a new language and survived the last white country the world will ever see.

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# Making India–China Connections: Tagore and Cheena Bhavan

**Avijit Banerjee**



China as an ancient civilization had contact with many regions and countries of the world. The cultural relation between India and China can be traced back to more than 2000 years ago. The close contacts between the two countries were extremely fruitful in the dissemination of Indian culture in China. There are numerous references to China in ancient Indian texts like the *Mahabharata*. Buddhism was a major force in connecting the two countries at that time. When Buddhism declined in India the two became culturally disconnected from each other in many ways.

Political developments in the nineteenth century further prevented close intercourse between the two countries. The old friendship was not resumed until 1924 when the Indian Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore visited China. Clearly, the award of the Nobel Prize to Rabindranath Tagore in 1913 was not only a turning point in the career of the poet, but it was also a reassertion of dignity for both India as well as Asia. Tagore went to China at the invitation of the Lecturer Association of Peiping (earlier name of Peking). During the visit, many Chinese scholars and intellectuals introduced and welcomed Tagore's arrival in various forms. Many of Tagore's works were translated and published during this period.

From April 12 to May 30, 1924, Tagore delivered speeches on Indian culture and civilization in places such as Shanghai, Hangzhou, Nanjing, Jinan, Beijing, Taiyuan and Hankou. People from the political, ideological, literary and artistic circles were very much influenced by Tagore and his ideas, and a large number of news items and comments were published in newspapers and periodicals.

Tagore was a visionary, always forward-looking. During his visit, he sought to promote the cause of China–India understanding, envisioning the essence of India and China relations to a higher platform of civilizational leadership and fraternal partnership. He emphasized that together they comprised 40% of humanity. He said:

“My friends, I have come to ask you to re-open the channel of communion which I hope is still there; for though overgrown with weeds of oblivion its lines can still be traced. I shall consider myself fortunate if, through this visit, China comes nearer to

India and India to China—for no political or commercial purpose but for disinterested human love and for nothing else”.

Tagore not only wanted India and China to take pride in their rich heritage and draw from their pasts to build their future of friendly contacts, but he was also a forerunner envisioning a globalized world community. His idea of building institutions based on such ideals resulted in the founding of Visva-Bharati University at Santiniketan in 1921. The university was truly international in its philosophy, goals and curriculum. As he said in China in 1924:

“Our institution of Visva-Bharati represents this idea of cooperation, of the spiritual unity of man. And I ask you, my brothers and sisters, to take part in building it, you who still have men among you mindful of the bond of love once established between our two peoples of the old”.

In Tagore’s view, the cooperation between Indian and Chinese civilizations was related to the future development of both countries as well as of Asia and the world at large. He thus sought to revive and strengthen historic relationships between the people of both countries. His global vision and sustained endeavour helped establish the Department of Chinese Language and Culture (Cheena Bhavana) in 1937, the only one of its kind in India and the subcontinent during that time.

After his successful tour of China, cultural interaction between the two countries gained substantial development both in dimension and depth. A number of people in China related to art and literature gained interest and Beijing University introduced Indian history, philosophy and language in its curriculum. Later, many Chinese scholars and students started visiting India to pursue research here. These scholars included Tan Yun-Shan, Xu Zhimo, Xu Dishan, Xu Beihong, Tao Xingzhi and Zhang Daqia.

On his return from China Tagore started the programme of Chinese studies in Visva-Bharati in 1926 with the help of the French scholar Sylvain Lévi and a Chinese scholar, Linwo Jiang. When Tan Yun-Shan came to Santiniketan in the year 1928, he worked tirelessly to set up a research programme of Chinese studies. Such efforts crystallized in the Cheena Bhavana in 1937 with the following objectives:

- i. To conduct research studies in Indian and Chinese learning
- ii. To promote the interchange of Indian and Chinese cultures
- iii. To cultivate friendship and fraternity between the two nations of India and China
- iv. To join and unite the people of India and China
- v. To promote jointly, universal peace and harmony of humanity
- vi. To help build up “The Great Unity” of the world

Tagore presided over the inaugural ceremony of the establishment of Cheena Bhavana with great joy because his vision of a cultural renewal between the two nations had been translated into reality, and Cheena Bhavana was the living symbol of this reality. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru sent his daughter, Indira, to represent him at the opening ceremony of Cheena Bhavana.

## **Cheena Bhavana in the Initial Phase**

In its initial phase, Cheena Bhavana offered some certificate and diploma courses. It was primarily a research institution providing facilities for Chinese scholars to study Indian culture, philosophy, regional languages, and for Indian scholars to study Chinese culture and history. Cheena Bhavana also paid special attention to Buddhist studies including the study of Buddhist scriptures and translation work. The institution attracted a good number of students and scholars, particularly from China and various parts of India, and also from almost all Asian countries as well as Africa, Europe, and America.

During this period, the department started the publication of the *Sino-Indian Journal*. Many distinguished personalities and patrons such as Wu Xiaoling, Shi Zhen, Chiang Kai-shek, Soong Mei-Ling, and Zhou Enlai greatly enriched the institution with their donations for financial support. During his stay at Santiniketan, Xu Zhimo forged a profound friendship with Tagore.

Wu Xiaoling, an expert in Chinese classical literature and Sanskrit, came to India in 1942 and joined Cheena Bhavan as a professor. His wife, Shi Zhen, was a Chinese translator and well-versed in Bengali language. In 1942, she enrolled in Rabindra Bhavan as a graduate student and studied the works of Rabindranath Tagore and other Bengali literature.

In 1942, Chiang Kai-shek and his wife, Soong Mei-Ling, visited India. During this visit, they visited Visva-Bharati and donated Rs 50,000 to the university and Rs 30,000 and many rare and precious texts to Cheena Bhavan.

When in 1957, the first Premier of the People's Republic of China, Zhou Enlai, visited India, he visited Cheena Bhavan. Here, he presented several books on Chinese literature and donated 60,000 rupees for Tagore's memorial. Other notable personalities such as Wu Bei-Hui, Sisir Kumar Ghosh and Chang Renxia were associated with Cheena Bhavan. Their support and contribution in the development of the institution were remarkable.

To be sure, the period between 1937 and 1970 is regarded as the golden period for academic activities in Cheena Bhavana. Various language courses besides Chinese, such as Tibetan and Sanskrit, thrived. Significant publications, lectures and many scholarships provided for students to study and pursue research on China followed the academic ideals of Cheena Bhavana. Buddhism, India–China relations, history of China, Chinese art and comparative studies constituted some of the important research areas. Such studies became the nucleus of China studies research in India.

## **Contribution of Some Renowned Scholars of Cheena Bhavana in the India–China Academic and Cultural Interaction**

Besides the above, a scholar who made a significant contribution to Sino-Indian studies was P. C. Bagchi. He was associated with Cheena Bhavana for two years, from 1945 to 1947, as professor and as Director of Research Centre in Visva-Bharati. He was engaged in the study of Buddhism and also went to teach Indology in China. He knew ancient Chinese, Sanskrit,

Tibetan, Nepalese and Central Asian languages. He was also the earliest author to write a special historical survey of India–China contacts. The book titled *India and China: A Thousand Years of Cultural Relations* provides information about India and China's ageless affinity. He gave a very scholarly and comprehensive survey of this phase of India–China relations. Undoubtedly P. C. Bagchi's contributions lent zeal to understand the legacy of the multifaceted Chinese heritage and its importance to Indian history.

Some of the other renowned scholars associated with Cheena Bhavana were Pandit Vidusekhara Sastri, P. V. Bapat, V. V. Gokhale, Sujit Kumar Mukhopadhyaya, Santi Bhikksu Sastri, N. Aiyaswami Sastri, and Prahlad Pradhan. Younger scholars included Krishna Kinker Sinha, Amitendranath Tagore, Satiranjana Sen, K. Venkataramanan and V. G. Nair.

Translation of a number of Jataka stories from the Chinese Tripitaka by Amitendranath Tagore, a chapter of the Vinaya of the Dharmaguptaka school from its Chinese translation by Prahlad Pradhan, translation of the Chinese version of a Dhyana text attributed to Kumarajiva by Sujit Mukherjee, translation from Chinese of a lost Sanskrit work called *Arthavargiya-sutra* by P. V. Bapat and a comparative study of the different versions of the *Sigalovadasuttanta*, a Buddhist text, by Rev. Pannasiri were some of the notable works.

Pa Chow, a Chinese scholar at Cheena Bhavana, made a comparative study of the existing Sanskrit version of the *Avadanasataka* and its ancient Chinese translation and collected important materials which shed light on the original version of the text.

Krishna Kinker Sinha, a scholar of Chinese studies, joined Cheena Bhavana in 1942. He learned the Chinese language and studied Chinese classical texts under Tan Yun-Shan. Sinha was later appointed as the first Indian Professor of Hindi and Indian Culture at the Oriental College in Yunnan, China, and became the first Indian professor to teach Hindi in China before India's independence. Sinha also did a number of translation works from Chinese into Hindi such as the translation of *Gandhi and China* by Tan Yun-Shan, *San-Min-Chu-I* by Sun Yat-sen, and *China's Destiny* by Marshal Chiang.

It may be mentioned that from 1937 till his retirement in 1970, Tan Yun-Shan tirelessly led Cheena Bhavana and during this period the works of the above scholars played a remarkable role in highlighting India–China cultural interaction and Buddhism's pivotal role in the history of cultural connectivity of the world.

### **India–China Cultural and Educational Exchange with Cheena Bhavana Leading the Way**

After its establishment in 1937, Cheena Bhavana witnessed a significant number of visits by eminent persons besides official and private scholars. Mahatma Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu, Rajendra Prasad, S. Radhakrishnan, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad visited Cheena Bhavana once or more. Jawaharlal Nehru took a special interest in Cheena Bhavana whenever he visited Santiniketan.

The famous Chinese artist Xu Beihong came to Santiniketan in 1939 and was associated with Cheena Bhavana for about a year as Visiting Professor of Chinese Arts.

Prior to this, in 1940, there was the goodwill mission of Dai Jitao, President of the Examination Yuan of the Nationalist government. He wrote an essay in Chinese tracing the historical and cultural amicable relations between India and China and praying for its renewal. This document, engraved on a plaque, was installed on a wall in Cheena Bhavana.

The first Chinese Buddhist Mission to India, led by Rev. Tai Xu, visited Santiniketan and spent a week as a guest in Cheena Bhavana. His prominent disciple, Grand Master Fa-Fang, joined as a Research Fellow in Indian Buddhism in 1942. During his stay at Santiniketan, she studied Pali, Sanskrit and English. In 1945, she went to Ceylon to study further and returned to Santiniketan in 1946 at the invitation of Tan Yun-Shan and became a Lecturer in Chinese Buddhism.

Master Fa-Fang contributed immensely to strengthening Sino-Indian cultural exchange. Some of the books that he authored were *Buddhist Outlook on Life*, *The Order of a Buddhist* and *Culture of India*. Such a contribution spanning over several decades by scholars and statesmen on both sides was significant in the history of India–China relations in modern times.

After the unfortunate India–China border conflict of 1962, there was a bad phase in India–China educational and cultural exchanges, and Cheena Bhavana was also affected by this turn of events. As a result, many activities were stopped or became slow, and even the number of students and scholars joining Cheena Bhavana dropped.

After the epoch-making visit of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to China in 1988, there was renewed interest in India–China educational and cultural exchanges. In the 1990s, some of the activities resumed.

### **Recent Development in Cheena Bhavana**

Scholars who visited Cheena Bhavana in recent years, though for shorter periods, have contributed greatly to re-fostering academic exchange and friendship between India and China. Among them, Geng Yinzeng, Du Weiming, Zhou Fucheng, Lin Chengjie, Charles Willemen, Dong Youchen and Bai Kaiyuan deserve special mention.

Besides them, Wang Lipin and Wu Ou of the Ancient Archives Study Centre of Beijing University came to Cheena Bhavana in January 2009 for two months to help catalogue ancient books preserved in the library of Cheena Bhavana.

Cheena Bhavana has also sought academic and cultural cooperation between Visva-Bharati and Chinese universities. In July 2011, Visva-Bharati University and Yunnan University signed a Memorandum of Understanding. Under this programme, about 500 students from both universities have already visited each other's institute.

In November 2014, Xi Jinping conferred upon Cheena Bhavana the “Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence Award” for its contribution in upholding the five principles of peaceful coexistence, strengthening people-to-people friendship and promoting world peace and development.

In November 2016, the Cheena Bhavana Library signed a Memorandum of Agreement with Shanghai Library. This agreement between the two libraries possesses important significance for India–China educational exchanges. Visva-Bharati University also signed an agreement with Yunnan Minzu University, Kunming, in December 2016, intended to uphold the academic objectives of each institution and promote better understanding between the faculty and students of each institution.

In 2017, Cheena Bhavana signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Peking University that facilitates five to seven students to pursue a one-semester course in China every year. In addition, regular organization of Teacher’s Training Courses that draw upon eminent faculty from Beijing University to deliver lectures has provided scope for exchange of knowledge and interaction for Indian teachers and researchers.

## **Conclusion**

The establishment of Cheena Bhavana is indeed a significant event in the history of India–China educational and cultural exchange. Since its foundation, Cheena Bhavana has provided a stable platform of knowledge building, which in turn has helped strengthen India–China relations in various fields. It has attracted a wide range of scholars and students. As an integral part of Visva-Bharati, Cheena Bhavana is destined to play a significant role in fostering India–China cultural relations and in promoting peace, harmony, mutual friendship and better understanding through regular scholarly exchanges and cultural and educational interactions.

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# Indian Industrialization and the Future of the Working Class

**Supriya Roychowdhury**



I'm absolutely delighted to be given a chance to pay my personal tribute to Shripad Dange. Part of my PhD thesis was on the textile industry in Maharashtra, and I was doing fieldwork in Mumbai in the '90s, when Shripad Dange was no longer alive. But his name was a vibrant presence in the industry to all whom I spoke to.

And he actually wrote the first report on the rights of textile workers, which anyone who studies the textile industry in India views almost as a bible. Dange was one of the founders of the Communist Party of India (CPI), and he was a typical politician of those times. He joined the nationalist movement with Gandhi, but he later turned to leftist organizations. And his long political career—he had thirteen years as a political prisoner—and, particularly the last few decades, were marked by many vicissitudes. Unfortunately, towards the end, he actually had to leave the CPI, of which he was the founder and one of the foremost leaders. For me, what is represented through Dange's life is that he actually represented the quintessential left politician of those times, moving very effectively between the trade union movement and the political party, that is, the CPI, of which he was a leader. But he was also the foremost founder of the trade union movement in the Maharashtra textile industry before he formed the CPI. And in fact, two of his most successful elections to the Lok Sabha, from the Bombay Central constituency, was the direct effect of his work amongst textile workers.

Why is this important? Because this movement from trade unionism to political parties is something which seems to have almost disappeared from our political world today. Political party leaders can no longer think of the working class as a constituency since they must speak to wider audiences. And in the process, any discourse or narrative on the working class is obviously dissolved to a great extent.

We don't really have the construction, or the political construction, of a working-class narrative. Several of us are trying—academics, trade unionists, politicians on the ground. But at the level of the nation, there isn't a working-class narrative anymore. On their part, this vacuum has also affected trade unions, because trade unions speak for a smaller constituency now, that is, the

organized working class. And they don't therefore have a political platform on which they can stand.

And many trade unions have actually moved from being ideologically inspired organizations to very professional outfits who are pursuing very specific, limited objectives within the framework of workers' rights. As things are, the platform from which they are speaking gives them no scope to talk about the larger working class as such. So the trade union movement is localized in space and time.

This brings me to the topic which is industrialization in India and the future of the working class. And I think one has to remind oneself of the deceleration of the communist movement, which can be a starting point actually for looking at the process of industrialization in India.

As of the 2024 elections, the parliamentary seats for both the CPI and the CPM have been reduced to, I think, two and four respectively. And there has been a steady deceleration of this. Of course there is a groundswell of ideology and activism inspired by socialist ideas, but we're not going into that. We're looking at more national figures—in that sense, if you look at the performance of the CPI and the CPM, they are not anymore national players.

Historically, communist or leftist parties have been closely aligned to industrial working classes through a network of trade unions. So one way of looking at the deceleration of the communist parties and at the decline of leftist ideas and ideologies in India is to look at what has happened to the industrial working class itself. Borrowing from the experience of industrially developed countries, the genesis of the modern industrial class happens through the transfers of large numbers of people from farms to factories. And in economics, this is known as structural transformation: that is, the shift from farms to factories, from country or rural areas to urban areas, from informal work to formal work.

This is the standard trajectory that the developed countries have followed, and even late developers like Japan, South Korea, etc., i.e. East Asian countries have followed this trajectory. Now, in India, it's a very stark and staring feature of our development that this expected transfer from agriculture to industry, from farm to factory, has not really happened. It is true that since economic liberalization, there is fast growth in GDP, there is industrial development, and there is a lot of wealth generation. We are going to be the third largest economy very soon. We are going to be the economic powerhouse of the future. However, we need to remind ourselves that the largest number of working people are still in the agricultural sector despite the fact that agriculture's share in GDP has declined systematically. It is now only 14 percent. There are successive agrarian crises reflected in rural indebtedness, farmer suicides, lack of public investment in agriculture, and very low and very slow development of large swathes of the country's rural areas. About 44 to 46 percent of the working population is still employed in agriculture. Now it is expected that in the course of development, industry's share in GDP will exceed that of agriculture because of higher productivity. And this has actually happened in India. So industry's share in GDP is 25 percent as compared to agriculture's 14 percent.

But the percentage of people who find employment in industry is actually very low. It is 25 percent. If you leave out the construction sector and you look only at manufacturing—construction is non-manufacturing—then it is only 11 percent. And there have been steady decline in the number of people who can find jobs in the manufacturing sector, particularly in organized manufacturing. On the other hand, there is, of course, the service sector. The service sector now leads development and economic growth. Fifty-five percent of GDP is accounted for by the service sector. But the growth of employment in services has been quite low in proportion. It is now only 31 percent, having risen from about 20–23 percent in 2013. There is obviously a great disjuncture between output and generation of employment.

In 2009, when the first Urban Poverty Report came out, one of our leading economists, S. A. Hashim said that the reason that agriculture continues to harbour large numbers of people, despite the fact that it does not have the space to do so, is a very complex problem, but one that is closely related to the kind of urban and industrial development that has happened in cities. We therefore need to look at what the service sector offers. The service sector offers highly paid jobs to technically qualified people. And there has been a spillover into other service sectors like hospitality, maintenance, security, housekeeping, and so on and so forth. There has been a huge boom in employment in all of these sectors. But these jobs are all typically unprotected and unregulated. They hover around the minimum wage. There is no security of tenure. So the attraction of those in rural areas seeking jobs in urban areas for the service sector is actually very limited. This is part of the reason why we are not seeing a major transfer of the job-seeking population from rural to urban areas.

Mainly what I wanted to emphasize is that in the process of economic growth and development, typically large numbers of unskilled or even semi-skilled labour look for factory jobs. And that is where the Indian economy has, to a certain extent, failed these job seekers. There are a large number of surveys but just taking one particular survey, the Enterprise and Establishment survey during the period 2017–18 to 2022–23, the loss of jobs in manufacturing was in the order of four million.

The policy response to this seeming crisis in jobs has been that governments have come up repeatedly with industrial policies with a focus on creating employment. When the UPA government was there, we had the National Manufacturing Policy of 2011, which aimed to create 100 million jobs in the sector by 2022. It didn't happen. The NDA government, as we all know, has this paradigm of Make in India. Very recently, in 2025, the National Manufacturing Mission has re-emphasized the goal of boosting the sector with a projected outlay of almost 200 lakh crores in sectors like automobiles, electronics, pharmaceuticals, and so on and so forth.

Now making policy is one thing. Policies, as we know, are often driven by political imperatives. Often it is a reaction or a response to data coming out on joblessness. As distinguished from policies, there is the question of a policy paradigm. I want to emphasize that the overall policy paradigm post-economic liberalization continues to be marked by features which are not necessarily conducive to creating jobs in the organized factory sector. Essentially, liberalization, which came in the 1990s, meant that the state was withdrawing from its role as leading

industrial development through large public sectors and would increasingly depend on private capital as the driver of investment in the industrialization project.

So the state facilitated both domestic and foreign direct investment such that private capital could become the main driver of industrial development. The overall aim was to make Indian industry competitive at the global level. If this was the aim—that is, globally competitive industry—obviously the shift to capital-intensive and technology-intensive industrialization, rather than labour-intensive, was the way to go. One can see this reflected in particular policies.

Every policy is accompanied by an announcement that it will lead to greater employment. However, when you see what is happening to specific sectors, it's a different story. So, this is a context where jobs are disappearing because of automation, because of increasing capital intensity and knowledge and technology intensity. Here, the ready-made garment export industry, connected to global players, large global companies, multinational companies which have invested in India for the production of ready-made garments, stands out because it is predominantly labour intensive and is offering employment to unskilled, semi-skilled job seekers, particularly to women.

Many of the women employed in this sector are rural, semi-rural, unskilled women with barely high school education, who are looking for employment because their sources of income in the agricultural sector have all but dried up. We have been studying the ready-made garment industry for many years, particularly in Karnataka, through successive surveys.

Around four to five lakh women employed in the garment sector in Bangalore. We have found low wages and very harsh working conditions. There is some social insurance, but no tenure security. There is no written job contract. Loss of jobs can happen any time. These features have become the main instrument in the hands of management and shop-floor supervisors in garment factories in Bangalore, who use coercion as an instrument of production.

These industries are also very valued in the eyes of the state as major foreign exchange earners. However, in terms of the workforce, they have created a footloose workforce, who move in and out of the industry or in and out of different factories in the industry itself in search of better working conditions or even in search of just 500 rupees more. If another factory or another sector pays more, they move out.

We found that the only option actually available for garment-sector workers is domestic work, which is not much better. But many move out to domestic service because it offers them a more relaxed way of making less money. So this footloose workforce actually offers a very fragile and unstable basis on which to organize trade union activities. This is also a workforce which, because of very low salaries, has a lot of indebtedness. We found that after working for 15 years women are getting as low as 10,000 or 12,000 per month, so there are no savings.

We also found that after retirement a large majority of the women are forced to go back to their rural areas of origin. And so this industry, in a sense, questions the whole idea of urbanization. Because what is happening is that through foreign investment in garment exports these women

are brought out of rural and semi-rural areas to provide labour for this highly profit-making industry.

This is what we call the informal in the formal, particularly in the garment sector. This is factory employment and there is a salaried wage and some social insurance. But as I have tried to explain, the basic parameters of formal employment are not there. And this particular sector, being part of the organized sector, bears some of the classic features of informal employment.

I now come to the question of how you represent workers' rights, or who represents workers' rights. In terms of a collective voice or collective organization, the problems which trade unions face is the shrinking of the organized sector. To mobilize and organize informal workers presents one of the most difficult and challenging tasks for trade unionists, because workers who do not have permanent or regular jobs fear termination if they engage with trade unions or in trade union activities. Hence, there is a low level of unionization in most sectors today. There is also a disconnect at the local level. Local-level trade unions are disconnected from larger national trade union federations.

State governments have responded with a whole range of welfare measures. You get free rations, free bus passes, free electricity, cash transfers to women, old-age widow pensions, and so on and so forth. Every government in every state has come up, almost competitively, with these welfare measures. And in a sense what these have done, these welfare provisions or social policies, is to dull the edge of want. In the process, what has happened is that the question of work, employment, livelihood, and income has even more receded into the background for the working class itself. So the demand is not for work and more income. The demand, or the expectation and the claim, is for social policies.

I would say at the end that the future possibly lies in organizations like the GATWU (Garment and Textile Workers Union). I have seen these kinds of grassroots trade unions struggling for over three decades in Bangalore and in other states. The script is written against them, but the struggle is very real and significant. In the struggle, one can actually see the opposed binaries of capital and labour working out. Furthermore, the challenge is often put forward by these trade unions to the state, because the state is a major stakeholder in industries like the garment industry. So they're negotiating not only with capital—that is, the owners of the factories—but also in a very substantive way with the state, which is an important creator and participant in the minimum wage board.

I want to end this by going back to one of the lines which I read from a text of Shripad Dange, which is that when we think of labour, we have to think not only of the yesterday and of the today, but we have to think of the tomorrow. To think significantly of the tomorrow in India's larger framework of industrialization and of the working class, I think there are two points which stand out.

One is that the state is obviously pursuing a model of economic growth which is based on the growth of the services sector. And one of the main questions which needs to be asked is: can the services sector lead development where the largest number of job seekers are unskilled or

semi-skilled? And if indeed the service sector is leading economic growth, then what kind of regulations does the state need to put forward to protect those who are employed in the services sector?

The other important question is: can the state in a democratic framework be persuaded, or perhaps even forced, to provide a more substantive, a stronger regulatory framework as far as industry is concerned, or as far as the services are concerned?

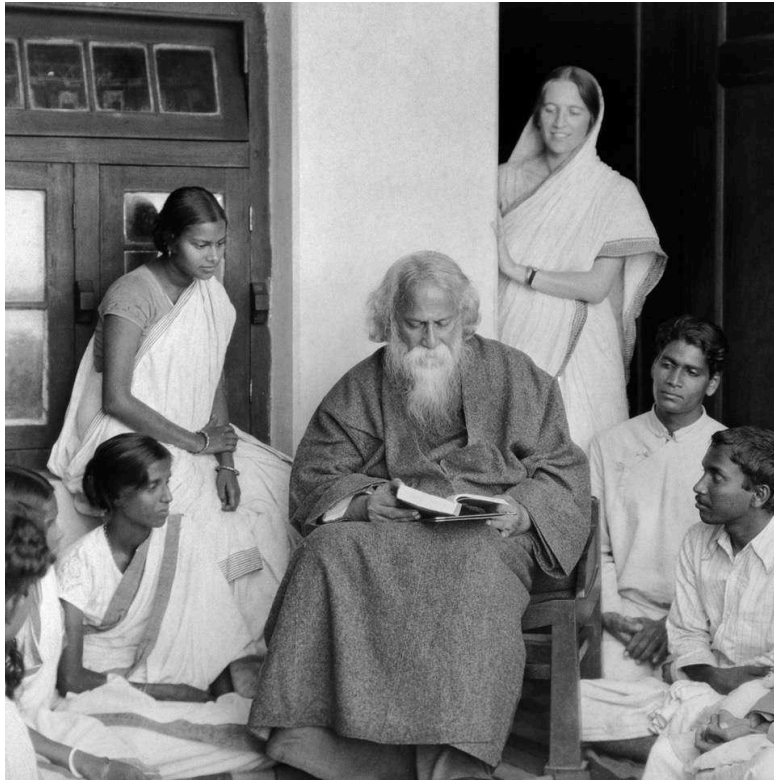
On many of these points—whether we're looking at the service sector or whether we're looking at the governance system, the labour governance system—there is enormous scope for activism to work itself out. Because we cannot at the same time be talking about macro policies. Macro policies are not framed at the local level. Macro policies are framed in New Delhi, where larger economic interests are driving policy. These interests are international. These are large economic and industrial interests of industrialists who are deeply vested in a globally competitive economic policy regime. So those are not changes that, you know, local trade unions or even academics like us can be talking about.

But we can certainly be talking about changes at these micro levels, where pressure can be brought about on states to provide a more supportive regulatory regime within the framework that exists.

*This is a shortened and lightly edited version of a transcript from a talk given at Indian Institute of World Culture, Bangalore.*

*Supriya Roychowdhury is Visiting Professor at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore. Her book, "City of Shadows: Slums and Informal Work in Bangalore", was published by Cambridge University Press in 2021.*

## Interview: Uma Dasgupta and Santiniketan



Q: In trying to find studies of Santiniketan and Visva-Bharati, I was not able to find so many. You would think that given the enormity and the importance of the project there would be a lot of work done on it. It seems it has not been given enough attention, and I wanted to ask you if you agree with this?

A: Yes, I do very much so. I mean, Tagore was obviously a great writer, a great poet, and that goes without saying, but he was also a very committed educator, that is hardly known. And there have been, so far as I saw from my research, and this is probably quite factual, no histories of Santiniketan. There have been contemporary tracts. When I was looking at the archives, I was asking the archivists and the librarians at Santiniketan, in the Rabindra Bhavana repository, which is the major repository of Tagore's works. And they said there are teachers' pamphlets. Teachers who taught at the time wrote little pamphlets about their own experience, and that we do call contemporary tracts in historical research. So I could use them, but there were just a very few, not even a handful, but no connected history of either Santiniketan or Sriniketan or Visva-Bharati.

Q: I know you've had a very long association with Santiniketan. Maybe you could just talk about that a little bit.

A: I had a strong family connection because my mother's mother lived her widowed years in Santiniketan. She was a lady from Dhaka. When her husband died, who was a lawyer in Dhaka, she had four children who were still growing up, it was a family of sixteen children, but four were still in the age of ten to fifteen, sixteen. And Tagore used to go to Dhaka, of course, and as was the tradition in those times, he was obviously by then quite a celebrity by the time he was going to Dhaka. And the ladies would get together and cook a wonderful meal for him each day of his stay. And one of them was my grandmother, my father's mother.

So there was a connection. There was also another connection which was my grandfather's youngest sister was a child widow, like so many were at that time. And the two child widows, I mean two remarriages of child widows that Tagore actually was present for—one was his own son, I won't go into that, but the second was a teacher of the Santiniketan school who was married to my pishima, my mother's father's sister, who grew up in their household—they were like one family.

And so Tagore wrote to my grandmother saying, "Why are you raising these little children in Dhaka all on your own? Just come to Santiniketan. We'll have a house ready for you." That was the kind of place Santiniketan was.

How did I come to this work? Because in 1973, when my husband was teaching at Presidency College and I was teaching at Jadavpur University, our son was born. And we were then in Oxford on two fellowships, each of us. And our son was born in Oxford. And my husband's teacher, who was then the Vice-Chancellor of Visva-Bharati, an eminent historian called Pratul Chandra Gupta, wrote to my husband saying, "Why don't you come to Santiniketan and help us improve the history department?"

Earlier vice-chancellors always did this because they knew what Santiniketan was about. And so my husband said to me, "If you agree, we can give up our Kolkata jobs and take our little boy, raise him there, and serve Santiniketan." And that sort of answered something of a question that we all should have, which is how were we so indifferent to Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan?

Because I began by saying in response to your first question that he was hardly known as an educator. Everyone knew that Santiniketan was there. Everyone thought it must be a great institution. But Bengali intellectuals didn't come forward to help. Bengali intellectuals, Bengali academics somehow treated it as a rural institution, which it was, but which it was meant to be as well. Not for the sake of it being rural, but he wanted a close connection between Santiniketan and the city. In other words, between the village and the city.

And so when I came I was looking for a post-doctoral research project because once you start research you don't want to stop it. And nor did my husband want me to stop my research.

And that's why he said, "Look, try and find something close by to Santiniketan to work on. Then we can all be together as a family without you having to go anywhere because the child is so small." And I completely agreed with him.

And so we came, and I began to look at the Rabindra archives, which we always knew to be literary archives, which it is, but that it had so many letters—thousands of letters—from all over the world to Tagore. And he also answered letters. And that, I think, we never factored in.

And so when I found nothing written on Santiniketan as a history, and the archivist also didn't know that there was anything, quite rightly, except those tracts, I said, "What about the letters?" They said, "Yes, the letters are there. They're still being hand-listed. We don't have a catalogue." And I said, "Okay, never mind. Can you still let me read those letters and I'll be very careful?" And I did.

And I just—I didn't know who had come, who had gone, how Santiniketan had come up. So I just started from A because it was alphabetical. Their hand-listing was alphabetical, and although it was incomplete, I started from A and went through the files. And there was so much that he wrote on Santiniketan. There was so much that he wrote about what he wanted of Santiniketan as the years passed, and what were his disappointments, what were his hopes.

So that's how I actually wrote a history of Santiniketan and a history of Sriniketan. That was my research, which went on for years, because Tagore needs time to really understand.

Q: You use the term "the Santiniketan quest" in your book, and you connect it to Rabindranath's philosophy, and what I found particularly striking was that you connected it to his approach to Indian history. And so I just wondered if you could expand on that a little bit—what the Santiniketan quest was and how it was connected to his philosophy.

A: Tagore wrote essays on India's history, and Jadunath Sarkar, who was a grounded historian unlike Tagore, in fact, translated one of them into English because Tagore wrote all of those five, six essays on India's history in Bangla. He thought this is a very important history. And yet, as you know, Tagore was not reading in the archives.

Now he did actually believe that we were not, in that sense, a nation because we were not a state. That's one thing. And therefore that sense of nation hadn't come because after all we were colonized earlier and, you know, close to Tagore's life and in Tagore's life a second time. We don't always talk of the Mughal period as a colony, but it definitely was because there was a lot of merging of cultures, right?

But the British was a different issue because after all they were in all senses foreign, whereas, of course, in some senses the Mughals were also foreign, but that's not how we treated it.

Because what Tagore believed—and what is, I think, historically proven—that India, not being for ages a nation-state as it is now, was a civilization, a social civilization, where many other

streams of cultures were coming in. And this is why there has been a race problem, which he never denied. He said there is a race problem and there has been a race problem. It is a race problem to the end of his life. He said it hadn't been resolved.

But what had happened—he completely believed in that and he documented it in his own way in his essays—was that there was a continuous attempt to bring the Hindus and Muslims together. But the conflict part was very—was obviously getting a bit sometimes out of hand for various reasons, for religious reasons.

However, what gave him so much hope was that although it hasn't been resolved, there is a continuous attempt. This was because of two things. One was—where was the problem? The problem was they lived next to one another, Hindus and Muslims. Santiniketan was an ideal site for an alternative education because there were Hindus, Muslims and tribals living in the same area.

So they were staying next to one another but they wouldn't marry, they wouldn't eat with one another. That was the basic thing, or if you call it race. They wouldn't, you know, this thing of touch, which as you know is very endemic to orthodox Hinduism and also orthodox Islam.

So therefore how is it being resolved? At least, you know, they were staying next to one another physically, although there were these differences.

Secondly, he believed very much—he was actually devoted to the medieval saints whom he called the people's saints. Nanak was one of them, his great hero. He wrote on the Sikh gurus. And then there was Chaitanya who brought this great movement of love and mingling with one another. And actually almost teaching the people that there is no other preacher greater than man.

So, you know, that whole thing of humanism, human—it's all related to this. So man is the most—there is no other greater than man. So don't fight as man and man. Come together.

Q: I'm very moved by what you're saying, the emphasis on the human. And I mean you see it all over Santiniketan. You see it not only in his own writings but, for example, in Kala Bhavana and all of these great artists that come out of Kala Bhavana.

Because really, when I say emphasis on the human, I'm pointing to your comment that he didn't think about inter-civilizational dialogue as something between governments but really between men, you know, people knowing each other. Basically the idea that man must know man, and woman must know woman, but man in the very general—mankind.

And I really see that kind of flowering in the experiment of Kala Bhavana. And to me it seems like the artwork and the Santiniketan school of art is something that is of historic importance for all of mankind. And it's really—I see it as an achievement of human beings, but really again understudied, I feel.

So I was hoping you could say something about this: what made all this outburst of creativity possible.

A: Yes, because you know this entire experiment of forming a different education, a new education, which is what Santiniketan is about—I remember I started by saying bring the city and the village close—it had nothing to do with colonial education, which was the only other thing there was.

However, what did we want at that time? Even Nehru has written about this, leave alone Tagore. We wanted English education because we knew that the only way to get jobs from the government was—and indeed colonial education was aiming at that—they were creating clerks, doctors. And the middle-class Indians were lending themselves to this.

So this whole thing of being indifferent to Tagore's institutions, which you asked in the beginning—why didn't we serve more, why didn't Bengali intellectuals serve Santiniketan, as of course some of them did, but a very few—he had more Western human support, I don't mean money.

Artists came from the West. They loved Santiniketan. Tagore announced, "Anyone who likes my idea, come to Santiniketan." Kshitimohan Sen said to him—one of the core people there—Amartya Sen's grandfather, incidentally, "You are inviting all these people. How will we look after them?"

And Tagore said, "Look, I can only play the flute at the gate and invite people. You will have to do the looking after. Don't worry. You have only to give them your love. They will be happy." So therefore, yes, one other element in this whole experiment was that he did not of course join the Pan-Asian movement of Okakura, but Okakura was one of his closest friends, although Okakura died young.

If anything could be put up as a contrast between Western colonialism and our larger identity, not just as Indian identity, was our Asian identity. So Asian unity meant a lot to him. And indeed Visva-Bharati's early name, the early name that he thought of for a larger university, was an Eastern University. In fact, there is a whole long essay that he wrote which is called "An Eastern University." And then there is this very moving and historically important correspondence with C. F. Andrews, saying, "You know, Charlie, you thought I belong only to Asia, but I've been now to the world." He said, "I can't just call it an Eastern University. It must be an international university. So that's how Visva-Bharati got its name. No, Charlie, please understand, I belong to the world. The world has accepted me." So all these things were coming together. It was becoming larger and larger, I think, and the concept was growing.

Kala Bhavana actually started before Visva-Bharati was institutionalized, in 1919. Kala Bhavana meant so much to Tagore. For Kala Bhavan, Tagore was writing to Abanindranath, who was a swadeshi and remained a swadeshi for a very long time. Tagore leapt out of it, but not

Abanindranath. And the Bengal School of Art, which Abanindranath founded, of course a very remarkable school of art and has been recognized to be so, was entirely a swadeshi based art movement. Tagore said, "Please, uncle and nephew, please go to Japan. Look at their art. It's very important for us to know Japan's art."

A (continuing): I just want to say one thing about the—because it was so important to your intellectual—about your question why Bengali intellectuals, which you started with—why was Tagore's experiment marginalized, why wasn't it taken up.

Because I think of what I was saying then, that middle-class education was very important to the Bengali psyche and to the Indian psyche. I think it was also the Punjabi psyche, if one reads Tandon's book.

In other words, they wanted to be professionals. And one can't quite blame them for it because new ideas were coming into it. But then one has to understand therefore they had no time for an alternative education, which was the Santiniketan/Sriniketan/Viswabharati experiment. In one phrase, one must say this: that it was an alternative education where no degrees were ever given. And the students came to Tagore in his time and said, "Look, where will we go? You are not giving us any degrees." He understood. He was not at all an unsympathetic man. This is important for us to understand this.

He said, "However, I cannot have Visva-Bharati give degrees, but I will arrange for you. I understand your need for it." He tied up with the University of Calcutta that their syllabus would be taught as a parallel course to the Visva-Bharati course in Santiniketan for those students who wanted it. And some students did, and they took their exams at the University of Calcutta and their degrees from the University of Calcutta. And Ashutosh Mukherjee, who was also a great intellectual and greatly understood Tagore at his core, said, "Yes, of course, let that be done."

And this is why Visva-Bharati also actually had graduates who were Visva-Bharati graduates not by degree but Calcutta University graduates by degree, because they did two parallel courses. So in other words, what I'm trying to say was that it was alternative education absolutely from A to Z, because Tagore did not give degrees.

That has all changed. You said very beautifully that it is a futuristic thing, and I hope, and it must be, philosophically it is, but I don't see any hope for it as something that will completely reverse itself.

He didn't think Visva-Bharati would survive. And that was why he said to Gandhi—his last letter to Gandhi was this—"Will you take it as a trust? Will you be its trustee if you believe this is an institution of national importance, if you believe it is an institution of international importance, then I hope my country will believe the same and preserve it. And I leave it to you." I won't go into Gandhi's answer. But why did he say this? He was anxious that this institution would not survive.

So I think you have to connect all this in your understanding of the experiment, why in a sense it failed. You could call it a failure. How many people are following this? It's a central government university. The University Grants Commission has to follow their syllabus, has to follow their degree, absolutely from bottom up and up down all the way. So it can't survive as it was conceptualized.

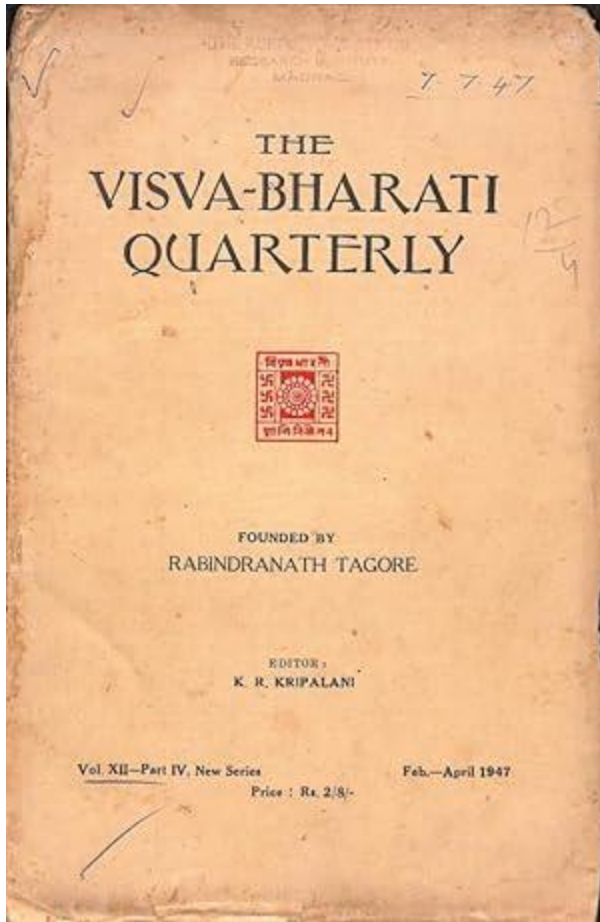
Q: Maybe in the future, you know. I mean, you're right, Umadi, that, you know, in one sense it has been a failure, but I hope that in the future it can be taken up.

A: Indeed, so do I. I join you in that hope.

*This is an edited excerpt from an interview conducted by Vishwabandhu of Prof. Uma Dasgupta based on her recent book "History of Santiniketan: Rabindranath Tagore and His Life's Work, 1861-1941." The full interview can be found on Youtube.*

*Professor Uma Das Gupta is a historian and a renowned Tagore biographer. She is the author of many books and articles on Tagore.*

# Archives: Visva-Bharati Quarterly Editorial



All civilisations are creations. They do not merely offer us information about themselves; but give outer expression to some inner ideals which are creative. Therefore we judge each civilisation, not by how much it has produced, but by what idea it expresses in its activities. When, in things which are a creation, the structure gets the better of the spirit, then it is condemned. When a civilisation merely gives a large stock of facts about its own productions, its mechanical parts, its outward successes, then we know that there must be anarchy in its world of idea, that some living part is lacking, that it will be torn with conflicts and will not be able to hold together human society in the spirit of Truth.

In the ebb of the tide, the river bed becomes too evident, its mud and sand and debris stand out in prominence;—with the loss of its depth the current loses its strength. In the history of every civilisation, there comes a period when the store of vitality, which it has accumulated in the distant ages, is exhausted at last. The manifestation of the creative delight, which is

life's ultimate object, becomes smothered by the intricate overgrowth of appliances,—the means thwarting the end itself.

Senility becomes apparent when the mind cannot create new ideas, or have the courage and faith to believe in its own ideal world; when individuals merely repeat, mechanical movements endlessly, and the habits of life become fixed. This is sure to happen when utility occupies the principal place in our endeavours. For life is not utilitarian in its spirit, its inmost desire being for truth and fulness of its own expression. Men have sometimes thought, in their career of prosperity, that the repetition of the methods whereby they achieved success, the multiplication of material, could go on for ever; until they were suddenly startled by the warning touch of death.

The time has now come when humanity can only be saved by the awakening of a new faith. For this, the one thing that is needed, most of all, is to make a place in our education for some great idealism. The principle of material self-seeking, which pervades the atmosphere to-day, can never give us new life. It carries with it unchecked passion which, as it burns itself out, exhausts vitality and brings its own doom.

It is a fact of unique importance in the history of the world to-day, that the human races have come together as they have never done before. In the olden days, the geographical barriers kept them apart. At that time of physical separation, each people, in its separate area, had to evolve a moral ideal of its own. Only those groups of men, who had the mutual sympathy and trust which could lead to unity, developed great civilisations, because they alone were able to transform the external fact of their close neighbourhood into a spiritual truth. So were the peoples of the earth developed. Some survived, with marked characteristics of their own. Some perished owing to strife and conflict.

Now, in our own days, through the advance of modern science, the rapid transport of modern times has altered the past situation irrevocably. The physical barriers between man and man are overcome; only the barriers of habit remain. But men go on living as though the old limitations were still real. In place of the natural obstacles of the past, they put up their own artificial modes of exclusion, their armaments, their prohibitive tariffs, their passport regulations, their national politics and diplomacies. These new obstructions, being artificial, are a burden that crush the people under the weight of their dead material and create deformities in their moral nature.

The mentality of the world has to be changed in order to meet the new environment of the modern age. Otherwise we shall never attain that peace which is the infinite atmosphere of Truth.

But to accept this truth of our own age demands a new education. Just as, hitherto, the collective egoism of the Nation has been cultivated in our schools, and has given rise to a nationalism which is vainglorious and exclusive, even so will it be necessary now to establish a new education on the basis, not of nationalism but of a wider relationship of humanity.

The aim of Visva-bharati is to acknowledge the best ideal of the present age in the centre of her educational mission. The question therefore arises, what is the immediate step that she should take in order to fulfil her object. The first thing which thus occupies our attention is to concentrate in this institution the different cultures of the East and West, especially those that have taken their birth in India, or found shelter in her house. India must fully know herself in order to make herself known to others.

Love hungers for perfect knowledge. The first step, therefore, must be to secure a true understanding of all the real wealth that has been produced and cherished by every section of those who compose the varied life of India. With the realisation of the ancestral wealth of our own culture, comes our responsibility to offer to share it with the rest of the world.

We have educational establishments where we are brought up in the idea that we can only borrow, but not give. Have we absolutely settled down into this state of destitution? We must not say so. Our wealth is truly proved by our ability to give, and Visva-bharati is to prove this on behalf of India. Our mission is to show that we also have a place in the heart of the great world; that we fully acknowledge our obligation of offering it our hospitality.

It has been said in our scriptures "atithi devo bhavas", asking us to realise that the Divine comes to us as our guest, claiming our homage. All that is great and true in humanity is ever waiting at our gate to be invited. It is not for us to question it about the country to which it belongs, but to receive it in our home and bring before it the best that we have. We are told in Kalidasa's drama, how Sakuntala, absorbed in her passionate love for Duslyanta, sat dreaming only of that which was the immediate object of her desire. She allowed the Guest to go away, unwelcomed and unattended. Therefore the curse fell on her that "she should not realise her desire for the sake of which she neglected her duty." When she forgot to pay her attention to him who was for her the representative of the large world of men, she lost her own little world of dreams.

Visva-bharati is India's invitation to the world, her offer of sacrifice to the highest truth of man.

# Archives: Gandhi the Man

## Rabindranath Tagore



After my return to India from some months' touring in the West, I found the whole country convulsed with the expectation of an immediate independence—Gandhiji had promised Swaraj in one year—by the help of some process that was obviously narrow in its scope and external in its observance.

Such an assurance, coming from a great personality, produced a frenzy of hope even in those who were ordinarily sober in their calculation of worldly benefits; and they angrily argued with me that in this particular case it was not a question of logic, but of a spiritual phenomenon that had a mysterious influence and miraculous power of prescience. This had the effect of producing a strong doubt in my mind about Mahatmaji's wisdom in the path he chose for attaining a great end through satisfying an inherent weakness in our character which has been responsible for the age- long futility of our political life.

We who often glorify our tendency to ignore reason, installing in its place blind faith, valuing it as spiritual, are ever paying for its cost with the obscuration of our mind and destiny. I blamed Mahatmaji for exploiting this irrational force of credulity in our people, which might have had a quick result in a superstructure, while sapping the foundation. Thus began my estimate of Mahatmaji, as the guide of our nation, and it is fortunate for me that it did not end there.

Gandhiji, like all dynamic personalities, needed a vast medium for the proper and harmonious expression of his creative will. This medium he developed for himself, when he assumed the tremendous responsibility of leading the whole country into freedom through countless social ditches and fences and unlimited dullness of barren politics. This endeavour has enriched and mellowed his personality and revealed what was truly significant in his genius. I have since learnt to understand him, as I would understand an artist, not by the theories and fantasies of the creed he may profess, but by that expression in his practice which gives evidence to the uniqueness of his mind. In that only true perspective, as I watch him, I am amazed at the effectiveness of his humanity.

An ascetic himself, he does not frown on the joys of others, but works for the enlivening of their existence day and night. He exalts poverty in his own life, but no man in India has striven more assiduously than he for the material welfare of his people. A reformer with the zeal of a revolutionary, he imposes severe restraints on the very passions he provokes. Something of an idolator and also an iconoclast, he leaves the old gods in their dusty niches of sanctity and simply lures the old worship to better and more humane purposes. Professing his adherence to the caste system, he launches his firmest attack against it where it keeps its strongest guards, and yet he has hardly suffered from popular disapprobation as would have been the case with a lesser man who would have much less power to be effective in his efforts.

He condemns sexual life as inconsistent with the moral progress of man, and has a horror of sex as great as that of the author of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, but, unlike Tolstoy, he betrays no abhorrence of the sex that tempts his kind. In fact, his tenderness for women is one of the noblest and most consistent traits of his character, and he counts among the women of his country some of his best and truest comrades in the great movement he is leading.

He advises his followers to hate evil without hating the evil-doer. It sounds an impossible precept, but he has made it as true as it can be made in his own life. I had once occasion to be present at an interview he gave to a certain prominent politician who had been denounced by the official Congress party as a deserter. Any other Congress leader would have assumed a repelling attitude, but Gandhiji was all graciousness and listened to him with patience and sympathy, without once giving him occasion to feel small. Here, I said to myself, is a truly great man, for he is greater than the party he belongs to, greater even than the creed he professes.

This, then, seems to me to be the significant fact about Gandhiji. Great as he is as a politician, as an organizer, as a leader of men, as a moral reformer, he is greater than all these as a man, because none of these aspects and activities limits his humanity. They are rather inspired and sustained by it. Though an incorrigible idealist and given to referring all conduct to certain pet formulae of his own, he is essentially a lover of men and not of mere ideas; which makes him so cautious and conservative in his revolutionary schemes. If he proposes an experiment for society, he must first subject himself to its ordeal. If he calls for a sacrifice, he must first pay its price himself. While many Socialists wait for all to be deprived of their privileges before they would part with theirs, this man first renounces before he ventures to make any claims on the renunciation of others.

There are patriots in India, as indeed among all peoples, who have sacrificed for their country as much as Gandhiji has done, and some who have had to suffer much worse penalties than he has ever had to endure: even as in the religious sphere, there are ascetics in this country, compared to the rigours of whose practices Gandhiji's life is one of comparative ease. But these patriots are mere patriots and nothing more; and these ascetics are mere spiritual athletes, limited as men by their very virtues; while this man seems greater than his virtues, great as they are.

Perhaps none of the reforms with which his name is associated was originally his in conception. They have almost all been proposed and preached by his predecessors or contemporaries. Long before the Congress adopted them, I had myself preached and written about the necessity of a constructive programme of rural reconstruction in India; of handicrafts as an essential element in the education of our children; of the absolute necessity of ridding Hinduism of the nightmare of untouchability. Nevertheless, it remains true, that they have never had the same energizing power in them as when he took them up; for now they are quickened by the great life force of the complete man who is absolutely one with his ideas, whose visions perfectly blend with his whole being.

His emphasis on the truth and purity of the means, from which he has evolved his creed of non-violence, is but another aspect of his deep and insistent humanity; for it insists that men in their fight for their claims must only so assert their rights, whether as individuals or as groups, as never to violate their fundamental obligation to humanity, which is to respect life. To say that, because existing rights and privileges of certain classes were originally won and are still maintained by violence, they can only be destroyed by violence, is to create an unending circle of viciousness; for there will always be men with some grievance, fancied or real, against the prevailing order of society, who will claim the same immunity from moral obligation and the right to wade to their goal through slaughter. Somewhere the circle has to be broken, and Gandhi will want his country to win the glory of first breaking it.

Perhaps he will not succeed. Perhaps he will fail as the Buddha failed and as Christ failed to wean men from their iniquities, but he will always be remembered as one who made his life a lesson for all ages to come.