

**ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA
SMT. DROUPADI MURMU
ON THE OCCASION OF CONVOCATION OF VISVA-BHARATI**

Santiniketan, March 28, 2023

I convey my heartiest congratulations to all the students who have received their degrees today. I also congratulate all the teachers, parents, guardians and the staff members who have contributed to their education and are happy to see the students reach a major milestone in their life.

As the President of India, I happen to be the Visitor of most of the institutions of higher learning under the Government of India. But I feel that it is a special privilege to be the Paridarshak or Visitor of this University established by one of the greatest personalities the world has ever seen – Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore. I am very happy to be with all of you in this historic 'Aamra-kunja'.

Yesterday, I had the privilege of visiting Thakur-Bari at Jora-sanko and offering floral tributes to Gurudev. I will cherish that visit to Gurudev's house as a pilgrimage.

Gurudev left the comfort of the most important city of the Eastern hemisphere in the early 20th century and came to this place which was a remote area those days. There is a message for everyone, especially the young students, in this. Pioneers like Gurudev choose difficulties over comfort to achieve larger objectives. The young students of Visva-Bharati have to focus on this learning from Gurudev's life that one has to come out of one's comfort zone to be able to make a difference.

As we all know that besides our national anthem 'Jana-gana- mana', the national anthem of Bangladesh, 'Aamaar shonaar Bangla' is also written by Gurudev. It is so appropriate that 'Bangladesh Bhavan' was established in Visva-Bharati after the birth of that great nation, nearly 30

years after Gurudev had left for his heavenly abode. Gurudev had also composed the university-song of Visva-Bharati. The song, called 'Ashram Sangeet' begins with the beautiful line:

“आमादेर शान्तिनिकेतन
आमादेर शोब होते आपोन”

It is our Santiniketan.
For us, everyone is our very own.

This ideal of universal love is the message of the *Ashram Sangeet*. The song, reflecting the search for unity in humanity, conveys the cosmopolitan spirit which Gurudev called 'Visva-Bodh'.

Dear students,

In view of Gurudev's stature and influence, it can be said that the founder of Visva-Bharati was a globally respected sage who combined the best of ancient Indian ethos with the modern streams of rationalism and humanism. You, the students of Visva-Bharati have to spread the eternal messages given by Gurudev.

Gurudev saw India as the leading source of knowledge for the world. He had described this pioneering role of India in 'Geet-Vitaan' in the following words:

“प्रथम प्रभात उदय तव गगने
प्रथम साम-रव तव तपोवने
प्रथम प्रचारित तव वन-भवने
ज्ञान धर्म कतो काव्य-काहिनी।”

Which means:

'Your horizon had seen the first dawn,
Your hermitage had echoed the first chant.

Your exotic abode had been the first paradise -
Spreading the fragrance of knowledge as poem and song'

Ladies and gentlemen,

Gurudev's belief that nature is the best teacher is reflected in the way this institution has been designed. There cannot be an ambience more conducive to holistic learning than what we see here. He wanted to liberate the process of education from the confines of conventional systems borrowed from the West. He was against the rigid structures and methods in which students were passive receivers and not active partners in learning. He also felt the lack of sensitivity ingrained into the system. Through Visva-Bharati, he has given us the gift of a learning system which is close to nature, which blends jnana and vijnana - that is - spirituality and modern science, ethics and excellence, tradition and modernity. For Gurudev, learning was boundaryless and boundless.

In many ways, the National Education Policy, 2020 re-affirms the convictions of Gurudev. We all know that when he realised that there was a lack of books in Bangla on certain subjects, he wrote new books in Bangla on those subjects. The importance of nature and mother-tongue was central to his idea of education.

Dear students,

Gurudev wanted education to promote creativity and individuality and not produce stereotypes and careerists. I am happy to note that Visva-Bharati has adhered to Gurudev's philosophy of education and produced many celebrated artists and creative individuals. Credit for maintaining this rich tradition goes to generations of teachers and students.

However, in order to measure up to the expectations of Gurudev from Visva-Bharati, everyone in the University should remember what he had said in the first meeting of its Executive Council. Gurudev had said and I refer to him: 'Though this Visva-Bharati is India's own, it must become the site of the entire world's endeavour' to not only disseminate but generate knowledge. Thus, Gurudev wanted Visva-Bharati to become

a global knowledge-hub. It is the duty of everyone associated with Visva-Bharati to keep in mind Gurudeb's vision and wishes.

Gurudeb took pride in the Indian knowledge tradition. In our tradition, it is said – 'Only that learning is meaningful which liberates:

सा विद्या या विमुक्तये

Liberation from ignorance, narrow-mindedness, prejudice, negativity, greed and other such limitations is the real objective of education. I am sure that students of Visva-Bharati will help build better communities wherever they choose to live and work.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we all know, Gurudeb made immense personal sacrifices to build and sustain this great abode of learning. He sold his ancestral property at Puri in Odisha. His wife sold her ornaments. Later, he used the money he received as part of the Nobel Prize for the educational institutions here. He set an example of great personal sacrifice for a noble collective cause. I believe that the joy of giving is the greatest joy, and Gurudeb's generosity is one of its finest examples. Students and teachers of the Visva-Bharati community owe it to Gurudeb to follow his spirit of giving.

I once again congratulate all the students for their accomplishments. I am sure that the Visva-Bharati family will continue to move ahead with the grand vision of universal well-being. I wish the students, teachers and everyone associated with the university, a very happy and fulfilling future ahead. In the end, I bow in reverence to Gurudeb Rabindranath Tagore.

Thank you!
Jay Hind!
Jay Bharat!