

# The Visvabharati Ideal

BY

RABINDRANATH TAGORE.

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A great part of my life had been spent solely in literary work on the banks of the Padma, a branch of the river Ganges, among the village people, and away from the city of Calcutta. But the time came when I grew restless at this confined range of existence, and longed for freedom in the greater world. At last it became clear to me that I should found a school, which should be different from the schools wherein I had been instructed when I was a boy. The school life, which I had experienced in my early days, had been most distasteful to me, and I had played truant from it whenever I was able to do so. My elders, at last, had allowed me to give up school altogether, and I had gone on

with my studies at home. Thus my experience had impressed on me the suffering, owing to the repression of personality, the dissociation of life from the subjects of their study, which boys endure from the school system in vogue in our country, and most other countries in the world. Therefore, when the call came, I went from my home on the Ganges to Santiniketan, in order to find there a school in the midst of the Asram itself.

It will be clear from what I have said, that I had never had any technical training as a schoolmaster, and had never passed any examinations. At first I was diffident about myself, and thought that the founding of a school was a task which was beyond my power. Later on I had one or two with me who had received academic training, and they helped me in my work. When the school was started, I think there were only five boys in all; which made it possible for me to come into very close contact with them. I used to be their comrade in their

games and their picnics; in the evening I would try to entertain them by reciting the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. I used also to invent stories for them, which went on and on, in different chapters, night after night. In this way, gradually, the work of my school grew and the number of boys increased.

This, then, seemed to be my mission, to have a school where I could make children happy and give them as much freedom as I possibly could. I never said to them—“Don't do this,” or “Don't do that.” I never prevented them from climbing trees, or going about where they liked. From the first I trusted them! and they always responded to my trust. Parents used to send to me their most difficult children, who were supposed to be incorrigible. When the children found themselves in an atmosphere of freedom and trust, they never gave me any trouble. The boys were encouraged to manage their own affairs and to elect their own judge, if any punishment was to be given. I never punished them myself.

So things went on, until, from having merely five boys to teach, the school had grown into a big school, with about two hundred boys—all of them in residence.

Then, after many years of this school work, a new restlessness of spirit came over me. It seemed to me as if I myself had further need to expand my own life and to find my own freedom in a larger world of men and things. It happened at this very time that I had an illness, and my doctors advised me to undertake a sea voyage to the West, as soon as I was well enough to travel. I decided to go to England. When I was convalescent in India, before starting on my voyage, and resting near the river Padma, I had been forbidden by the doctors to do any more original writing for a time; and so I had amused myself by trying to translate some of my poems into English. I thought very little indeed of these translations at that time; for I had a complete diffidence about my powers of writing English, which I have not yet been able completely to overcome.

When I arrived in London, I found the people of the West further away from me than ever. I was solitary in the midst of the great crowd; and I did not know how to break through the barriers of my isolation from my fellowmen. The people all round me in London were so close to me and yet so distant from me. At last I called to mind an English acquaintance of my own, whom I had met at the house of my nephew, Abanindranath Tagore, in Calcutta. He was William Rothenstein, the artist. I looked his name up in the telephone book of the hotel, and begged him to rescue me from my isolation, and to open the door of the West to me. Soon after this, one day, in the course of conversation, Mr. Rothenstein asked me if I had any translations of my poems with me. I handed over to him the manuscript which I had prepared during my days of convalescence. He took away the poems, which for the most part were taken from my Bengali poems called *Gitanjali*, and brought them back on the next day, with great enthusiasm, saying that

he had been very much impressed with them indeed. He said to me: "You may, perhaps, doubt my opinion as an artist; but if you will allow me, I will get them copied and show them to two of my friends who can judge much better than I."

He had two copies prepared, and sent one to Mr. W. B. Yeats, the Irish poet, and the other to the Rev. A. Stopford Brooke. The result was that these translations from *Gitanjali* were published and accepted, not only in England but on the continent of Europe and in America. Thus, by means of my poems, I was able to win my way to the heart of the West, and I have felt ever since that I have been accepted by them.

Something further happened at this time. I had found a few English friends who were ready to help me and to share in my work at Santiniketan. This brought a new element to the school itself. When these other scholars, teachers and friends came back from the West with me, and helped me in my work, its spirit became widened. This new

fact also gave me the thought that Santiniketan must open its doors. It must no longer be confined merely to a school which should be more free and happy than other schools. It must represent further and wider ideals, embracing humanity itself.

I had, all along, experienced the want of an institution in India, which should be a true centre for all the different Eastern cultures, concentrating in one spot the varied ideals of art and civilization which have been contributed to the world by the various countries of Asia. There were the ideals of India herself; there were those which represented the Far East; and those which represented Islam. Europe was already one. In the European countries the diverse intellectual and spiritual ideas of the West are concentrated in every university. For this reason, the students who go to Europe from Asia come into touch with the great European mind from the very first. They have no difficulty in discovering the mind of Europe, because it is there before them as a unity.

But such a concentration cannot be had in our Indian universities, or in the universities of the Far East. For the mind of Asia is not yet focussed. It has not been brought to a centre. It cannot be said to be one, in the same way that the mind of Europe can be called one. Hence there arises a great weakness in the presentation of the learning of the East.

The difficulty is, that our education is principally foreign and European. Our schools and colleges have made it their special object to give lessons through the medium of English and from an English standpoint. If we wish to study, in a scientific manner, the mind of Asia as a whole, there is no place in India where we may study it: we have to go to Europe, particularly to Germany or France, where scholars, because of the atmosphere of freedom and a wide human interest in which they live, have gained a more critical and comprehensive view of the East than we have done in India itself. We have lost, in India, the creative mind; we have been satis-



fied with secondhand knowledge and inferior imitative work.

What we need so much, at some centre in the East, is that there should be a seat of learning, in which the teachers and students should study together all that is to be learnt about the different cultures of Asia. India is the true home for such a centre, because very nearly all the cultures of Asia either sprang originally from India, or came into India from the outside in the course of her long history. The idea of founding such a centre of culture had come some time ago into my mind.

When I went to Europe and America a second time, in the year 1920-21, I had the opportunity of coming once more very close to the heart of the West. I found that, by my writings, I had gained a welcome among the peoples of Europe such as I had never dared to hope or to expect. It made me realize that a great responsibility was laid upon me to seek to bring about a true meeting of the East and the West, beyond the boundaries of politics and race and creed. I

was convinced that my own institution, at Santiniketan, must now open wide its gates. It must offer to those who might come from the West that generous hospitality which India had traditionally afforded to those who have visited her shores. Thus, gradually, this idea of founding a centre of Indian culture, with which I started, was enlarged. The fuller idea of Visvabharati now included the thought of a complete meeting of East and West, in a common fellowship of learning and a common spiritual striving for the unity of the human race. The stress was now to be laid on the ideal of humanity itself.

I had the opportunity, during my tour in Europe and America, of meeting many Western students and scholars. They showed a great amount of enthusiasm when I told them of my object of establishing an institution in India for working together in a common pursuit of knowledge, where lovers of truth and of men can meet from all parts of the world. I asked Professor Sylvain Levi, of Sorbonne and Paris Universities, if

he could come out in order to help me to inaugurate this new type of institution, which I had named Visvabharati. At first he said he was unable to come, because he had an invitation from Harvard University, in America. But a day or two later he came to me again, expressing his intention of cancelling his engagement, and joining us in Santiniketan. The months which he spent with us have been an inspiration to all our students and teachers.

Other eminent scholars have now offered to come and join us. Dr. Winternitz, of Prague University, Czecho-Slovakia, has already arrived. I met him also on my Western tour, and he very readily accepted my invitation, obtaining leave from his own Government for one year in order to take up his work among us. Especially he intends to teach our students how to undertake research work, in ancient Indian Literature, on modern scientific lines. We have already on our staff a French teacher from Switzerland, M. Benoit, who has joined us this year

and has offered his services voluntarily. We have a lady from Vienna University, Dr. Miss Kramrisch, who has made a profound study of Eastern Art. She has given lectures before the University of Calcutta, and at other places, but her home is with us at Santiniketan. A French lady who is an artist of no mean reputation is about to come to us and join us in our work. Many others, among whom are European scholars of distinction, have promised their services if room can be found for them.

But the conception which I have sketched out is not merely one-sided. I do not wish it to be understood that Western scholars come over here to us only to teach our students what they themselves know. They come also to learn from us, and they are greatly helped and encouraged in their own studies when they find themselves closely in touch with our own students and teachers. For example, I have been told by Dr. Sylvain Lévi himself, that he has been greatly helped by some of the teachers who were at Santiniketan when he came among us.

Therefore, I am perfectly certain that when these great scholars from the West come more and more into intimate contact with our own people, who are working at their own subjects in the same field, they will understand the work which has already been accomplished in India itself and is likely to be accomplished in the future. A mutual sympathy and generous co-operation will be established, which will be lasting.

I have spoken, hitherto, about teachers coming from the West, but we have the promise that students also will come and will learn from us what we in turn have to teach. They will live on terms of perfect equality with our own students, and will share a common life with them.

With this object in view, and in order to realize, at one centre of culture, the spiritual unity of mankind, I have founded our Visva-bharati. The burden of such an undertaking is far too great for me to bear alone. But I have felt that unless a nucleus is formed and a start actually made, it would not be possible for

me to go to my people and ask for their help. The school itself at Santiniketan has been a heavy burden for me to bear all these years. Now that this extra burden is added, the responsibility has become much too great for any single individual. Therefore, I have handed over my institution to the public, and have entrusted it into their hands. It has been registered under the Act, and has now a definite constitution of its own.

I feel, when I look to the future, that our Visvabharati at Santiniketan may become one of the intellectual gateways to India, which may connect our country intellectually and spiritually with the world outside. There is not in India, at the present time, a single place where people from other parts of the world can come, and find out at first hand what the Eastern mind is, and what part India has played in the history of the civilization of mankind. For certain reasons, due mainly to historical conditions of internal weakness and conquest by foreign powers, India has become segregated not only

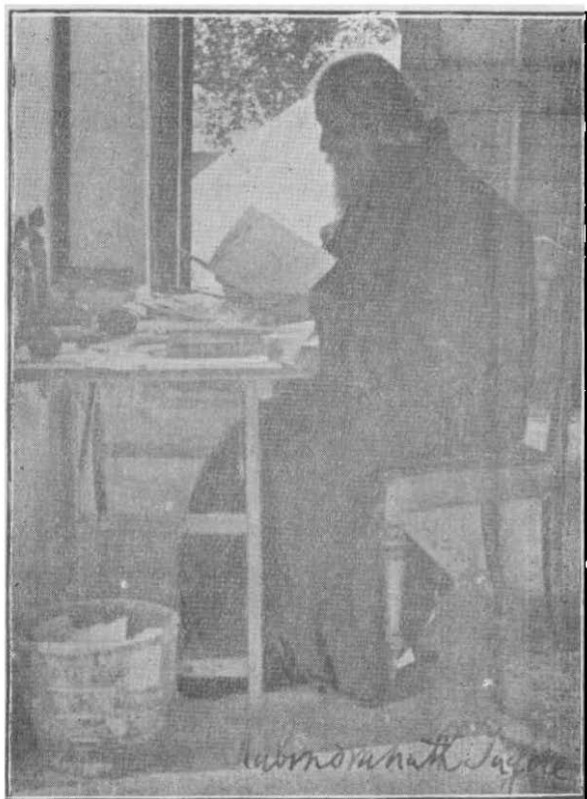
geographically but in mind and spirit also. This intellectual segregation has been doing immense injury, because our students have had very little educational training in their own culture, and therefore they still lack initiative and originality of mind. We have had very few men of the highest intellectual rank in India during the days of modern English education. The result of the education has been so inadequate all round, that it is clear there has been something wrong. It has not inspired any courage of thought. We have been intellectually timid and unadventurous. Our students have been carefully hoarding up all that has been given to them through foreign hands. They have been content that others from outside should do their thinking for them.

I am certain that this is not due to any inherent defect in our nature. It is rather because the knowledge we receive consists of information to be crammed and memorised, rather than the knowledge which brings inspiration with it. I remember the indifference

with which I did my lessons at school in my boyhood, owing to my repugnance at the lessons taught, and then the enthusiasm which followed, when I came upon the Vaishnava lyrical literature of Bengal, published for the first time when I was young. I had the leisure to study deeply, in my own way, all that could be learnt from this source. I am quite sure that this knowledge, which I obtained by myself and not at second hand, has been of inestimable value to me.

Somehow, fortunately for me, one of my elder brothers had a strong belief that a boy should not receive his early education through a foreign medium. On that account, I did not begin learning English at all until I was well on in years and had had a thorough grounding in Bengali literature. My own early education was given to me through the vernacular medium only. Thus, before I studied English I had the opportunity to learn and to appreciate some of the best Bengali books. I know well, therefore, from an intimate personal experience, what this





**RABINDRANATH IN HIS STUDY**

has meant for me in my own upbringing and for the growth of my own mind.

What we need most of all, for the unimpeded growth of our own intellectual life in this country, is that our students should be fully familiar with their own languages and cultures: then, along with this, they should assimilate the best culture of the West. They should have the opportunity to form their own judgment, through the medium of their own vernacular, and their own cultures. Then, and then alone, can they fully profit by learning all that the West has to teach.

All this will explain to you the reason I had in starting this university, where the East and West should meet together on equal terms. It has been possible already to gather there some Sanskrit scholars from India itself, and some Buddhist monks from Ceylon. We have also with us, in residence, some of our very best young artists, who belong to the new Art movement recently started in Bengal. They are accomplishing wonders in transforming the art of Bengal into something

truly indigenous and noble in its simplicity. The days of mere European imitation have passed away for ever from the Art of Bengal. We have some teachers of Indian music, who are proficient in the music of their own country. Before long, I hope we shall be able to have some teachers of European music also. Through their help, we shall be able to have a comparative study of Music, both Eastern and Western.

Only lately we have started an agricultural department in connection with our Visvabharati. This has been possible for us, because a young Englishman of great ability has volunteered to take up this work in conjunction with our own staff. He is a graduate of Cambridge University, who took his agricultural training at Cornell University in America; and he has recently come among us and started this work. Along with it, we hope to carry forward our social service work and also our co-operative endeavours. An American lady has volunteered, and has come out to join this agricultural and village work.

We have our own trained Indian social and village workers also. I feel sure that, with the full co-operation of Eastern and Western teachers and scholars and voluntary workers, we shall gradually be able to develop the whole of our institution at Santiniketan into a truly living university, with ample room on all sides for expansion and freedom of growth, built up on true foundations and in harmony with the spirit of the future.

One thing I must let my audience know, that they are not to expect in this institution the ordinary routine methods of class teaching which are the regular feature of the universities we know. The most important factor in Visvabharati is the scholars, who are expected to carry on their own work of study with the help and facility given to them in the shape of a good library, ample leisure and the prospect of mutual co-operation among themselves. If students come who have had a sound training, who have a mature mind, and an earnest desire to learn, it will be their duty to group round the scholar whom they

choose for their teacher, and accept help from him where help is needed. Those who still require an artificial method of feeding in their lessons, who need constant watching and goading from their teachers, will find themselves out of place in Visvabharati.

There was a time when we *did* possess in India a great university which was both truly popular in its origin and also offered facilities to students of all the different countries around. Nalanda University, as far as we can trace from historical records, was started and maintained by the people of India. Both material and moral resources were derived from all parts of the land; Nalanda, therefore, became a part of the national life of that period of Indian history. We can trace its remains in the ruins of today and can tell something of its greatness

We need some such institution in our own days, which will vitally energize the minds of the students of this land and give them a strong character of their own; which will make them, as it were, rooted and grounded

in the soil of India itself. When that energetic and creative mind is established, it will then be easy for us to assimilate, in a true spirit, and without any harmful effect, a foreign culture in addition to our own.

This, then, is the programme of Visvabharati. It has two aspects. On the one hand, the East has to know its own mind in the same way that the West, owing to its concentration of culture and its use of the vernaculars, has learnt to know its own mind. At Visvabharati there is to be the same concentration of Eastern culture, at one centre, that already exists in the West with regard to European culture. Only in the strength of a unity of her intellectual and spiritual experience can the East meet the West on equal terms. Secondly, we seek at Visvabharati to have a living relationship established between the Eastern and Western peoples. We seek to have that relationship at a centre where the mind is vigorous and active. Such a free and living relationship, if it is established, will do the greatest good, not only to India

but to the West also. It will enable the West to respect the East and the East to respect the West.

Having this two-fold ideal ever present in my own mind, I have come out of my retirement once again, and put on one side for the time being my literary work, in order to stand at the door of my own countrymen and other sympathizers, and ask them to help me in building up this work in a spirit of mutual fellowship and goodwill between the East and the West. I feel very deeply indeed, that this is a great age in which we are called upon to do our appointed task. It is an age when, through rapid geographical communication between the different parts of the world, the human races have all come close to one another. It is a great fact, this new closeness of communication. It is a physical fact which ought to have some counterpart in the world of ideas. The responsibility is ours, in this modern age, to translate this new physical fact into some great spiritual truth. It appears to me to be the mission of

India to show the way forward on a new adventure of faith in this direction.

For it is historically true, that from the very beginning of Indian civilisation the one great problem which India has had to face has been the race problem. This race problem—the contact of different races in a single confined area—has now become the world problem. For the world is now comparatively confined, in its geographical area, owing to the speed of modern travel. The contact of human races has become world-wide. The problem involved can be seen to-day on an extended scale in Africa and America, as well as in Asia and Europe. I feel that it is the function of India, owing to her experience of this racial problem within her own area, to begin this wider work of racial reconciliation throughout the world.

If you analyse the past history of India, you find one remarkable thing. The names of the successful fighters and conquerors have all been forgotten, because they did not help to solve the racial and religious problem—



the problem of unity—which was so specially India's own problem to unravel. There have been kings and emperors, for instance, who fought against Buddhism and re-established Hinduism in India; but their names have been absolutely forgotten even by Hindu India itself. Our people have no respect for those who fought in order to persecute, or overcome by force, religions or races which they thought to be alien to their own. But, on the other hand, such names as those of Kabir and Nanak are ever remembered by a grateful posterity. There is a long series of saints, who came into prominence during the great conflict between the religious ideas of Hinduism and Islam in Northern India. It was their noble mission to reconcile and harmonise religious truth by reaching out to a higher spiritual ideal.

You have also to keep in mind that most of these saints have come from the lowest classes of the Indian community. One of them was a Muhammadan weaver, some were cobblers, some were outcastes. These

saints are still held in highest reverence because they helped, in their lifetime, to harmonise the differences of religion and race.

India, therefore, has all along had to try to solve her own racial and religious problems, which have divided her again and again, and still divide her. This is what makes me hopeful that possibly the soil of India is the place for the beginning of the solution of the new world-problems of our own age, and that an experiment, such as ours at Santiniketan, may be successful. For such an institution as Visva-bharati will be like a wireless telegraphic station, which will catch the messages as they pass to and fro, from West to East and from East to West, and will deliver them to mankind.

When I was in Europe I met with individuals everywhere who were glowing with the enthusiasm of the new hope of unity and brotherhood which was dawning after the War, the hope of a humanity which should no longer be divided into a thousand conflict-

means 'a great saint.' These Sanskrit words have their significance in relation to the educational ideals of the poet. For he has been guided in his thoughts by the historic memory of the ancient Asrams in the forest glades of India, where peace reigned and great thinkers set out together to discover universal conceptions concerning the spirit of man, in the days when the Upanishads were composed.

For some years past, Rabindranath Tagore's aim had been directed towards creating a university of a new kind, where Indian thought might be studied as a whole in relation to the West, and a meeting-place might be found for those, in East and West alike, who had been drawn together in spirit, beyond the narrow range of nationalism, to search for the universal truth in man. He had purposed, amid the strife and confusion of the age to give concrete expression to the longing, that is in the heart of the world, for unity and fellowship. He had dared to hope, that some of the best thought in the

world to-day, in its search for unity, might find its true harmony and peace in Santiniketan Asram. As a poet, he had found it possible to come close to the mind of the modern world both in Asia and Europe. This had given him the power to interpret the East to the West and the West to the East. After the great War, and the armistice and unsettled peace that followed, the different peoples of the West began to turn their attention to Asia,—not now as exploiters and invaders, but as seekers after truth. The poet's visit to Europe at this juncture met with a welcome, which was overwhelming in its spontaneity of affection. This sympathy in Europe convinced him more than ever, that the time had arrived to make a venture of faith and to offer to those who might come from the West the full hospitality of the Asram at Santiniketan and the right hand of fellowship in seeking to carry forward the true meeting of East and West.

On his return from Europe in July, 1921, Rabindranath Tagore enlarged and widened

the scope of the new university which he was planning. He gave it a constitution and a programme, and invited scholars and students to come from distant lands to join in his work. Ever since then he has been devoting to this cause all his energy and enthusiasm. He has travelled to Ceylon and to different parts of India explaining his objects, and he proposes to go to the Far East in order to make his ideas known there as well as in Europe and in India. The ideal always before him fundamentally has been to realise, in and through education, the essential unity of man.

The objects of Visvabharati, as set forward in the Constitution, represent this ideal of the poet. First of all, there is stated in general terms the object of all education, to study the mind of man in its relation to truth. Then, the particular aim of Viswabharati is described, as the union at one centre of the different cultures of the East, so that they may be brought into living connexion with the learning of the West. The Eastern cultures,

owing to historical circumstances, have lost their unity. The poet holds, that this unity must first be restored, if the West is to appreciate the significance of Eastern thought as a whole. Therefore, in accordance with this principle, the earlier part of the programme of Visvabharati reads as follows :—

“ To bring into more intimate relation with one another, through patient study and research, the different cultures of the East, on the basis of their underlying unity.”

The further central object of Visvabharati is set forward in the following terms :—

“ To approach the West from the standpoint of such a unity of life and thought in Asia : to seek to realise, in a common fellowship of study, the meeting of East and West, and thus ultimately to strengthen the fundamental conditions of world peace, through the free communication of ideas between the two hemispheres.”

During the last two years, the attempt has been made to carry forward the poet's purpose step by step in Santiniketan. Owing to his

personality and to the attraction of his ideal, eminent scholars from Europe have made themselves ready to come out to the East and have offered their services to Visvabharati, joining its teaching staff. Dr. Sylvain Levi of the Sorbonne University at Paris, has been in residence for a year and has rendered invaluable assistance. Dr. Winternitz of Prague University, Czechoslovakia, has now succeeded him. Dr. Geiger, of the University of Vienna, is soon to follow. Other teachers and scholars, who have shared the poet's thoughts and cherished his ideas, have joined Visvabharati, and many more have expressed their intention of coming out in the near future. The Far East also has had its representatives at the Asram. The study of Chinese and Tibetan has already been undertaken. If the poet is able to carry out his intention of visiting Eastern Asia during the autumn of 1923, these ties with the Far East, which are somewhat feeble at present, will be strengthened.

It appears to be in the natural fitness of



**THE POET IN FRANCE.**



**THE HOUSE OF THE POET**



things, that India should provide, in the East, the home for such a centre of world culture and fellowship. For from India, the Buddhist movement originated, which spread a humane civilisation far and wide in Asia and reached the confines of Africa and Europe. Also, from the earliest times, the Indian environment has been congenial to those spiritual yearnings, which mark the passion for unity within the mind of man. India has, furthermore, from the beginnings of her own history, been occupied with the two kindred problems of the union of races and the harmony of creeds.

In working out the full educational purpose of Visvabharati, Rabindranath Tagore has consistently refused to allow any divorce to take place between the scholarly and retired life of academic culture, on the one hand, and the hard struggle for existence among the masses, on the other. The problem of the people of India is essentially an agricultural problem. Near to Santiniketan, the poet many years ago had established an agricultural farm at Surul. At first, this practical

experiment, in connexion with the village life of India, had not succeeded. But recently it has developed in a remarkable manner. A new start has been made, and teachers and students, living a common life together have undertaken a truly scientific work, both of cultivation of the soil, and also of what may be called the economic reconstruction of Indian village life. They co-operate with the villagers in every possible way, helping them in their medical requirements, in the draining and sanitation of their villages, in the education of their children, in their arts and crafts. The university section of Visvabharati has thus been brought intimately into touch with the people of the whole neighbourhood, who are nearly all engaged in agricultural work.

This development at Surul represents to the poet's own mind another aspect of the inner striving of the spirit of man to attain unity. For if the Visvabharati ideal of human brotherhood is to be fulfilled, there is obviously needed, through the work of

education, a healing of the world-wide breach between the rich and poor, the scholar and the labourer, the learned and the unlearned, as well as a solution of the conflicts and divisions which have taken place both in the creeds and among the races of mankind. Furthermore, the Surul Farm, as an integral part of Visvabharati, has accomplished already in another sphere a true meeting of East and West. For while the East has been able hitherto to preserve its village life almost intact and to keep the people wedded to the soil, thus providing an asset of great value for the future of mankind at large, the villagers of India to-day need all the help which the practical science of the West can afford, to revitalize their villages, to save them for human progress, and to protect them from disease, so that they may not merely linger on, as a survival of the past, but may flourish anew under modern conditions and enter into the current of modern life.

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festival, and song have their own vital part to play in leading to a mutual understanding and sympathy between the different races of mankind. These things all give joy and beauty and colour to human life. They are the vitalizing forces in education. As food becomes mere indigestible dead matter, whenever the vitamins are absent from it, so education is dead where these aesthetic and artistic factors do not function. Therefore, the poet has given them a prominent place in his school work and also in the recent development of Visvabharati. Fortunately, he has been able to appeal to the leaders of art and music in India,—and especially in Bengal,—to provide him with students and teachers. He has been singularly fortunate also in gaining the sympathetic support of the art and music lovers of the West. A true art renaissance movement has now found its home in Santiniketan, and the East and West are meeting together at the heart of this renaissance in a singularly fruitful manner.

With regard to the religious atmosphere of

Santiniketan, its essential note is freedom. Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, the poet's father, laid down three simple principles to be observed within the precincts of his Asram. No image should be made the object of worship, no word of religious controversy should be spoken, and no injury should be done to the life of bird or beast. It was Maharshi's ardent wish, that men of all races and religions might come to the shelter of the Asram and find that peace which he himself had found, without any distraction of controversy or offence to conscience.

It may be well to recall, in this connexion, the actual words of the Maharshi, which are to be seen engraven on stone in the Asram. They form, as it were, a charter of universality on the basis of which Visvabharati has been established. They read as follows:—

“ Here in this Asram, the One Invisible God is to be worshipped, and such instructions are to be given as are consistent with the worship, the praise, and the contemplation of the Creator and Sustainer of the

world, and are productive of good morals, religious life, and universal brotherhood."

At the time he wrote those words and had them engraven on stone, Maharshi could not forecast how his own heart's desire would find its fulfilment at last. He died without seeing his hopes realised. To outward seeming, indeed, they had very nearly failed. But he had a supreme faith, that one day they would be accomplished; and if he could have lived to witness the meeting of men and women and children of different races and religions in his Asram, worshipping the One Invisible God and seeking to lead a life of brotherhood together, his heart would have rejoiced.

While freedom is thus a distinguishing feature of the religious life of Santiniketan, this has not led to any vagueness or indifference as to ultimate spiritual truth. The poet's practical proposal is that each one of the religious cultures of mankind, which carries within it the treasures of a great historic past, should receive its own recognition and



have its own seat within the borders of Visvabharati. Thus, for the Parsee community, he would have an institute and library, where the Parsee dwellers at Santiniketan might carry out their special studies and researches in Zoroastrian literature. Already within Visvabharati, there is a Buddhist residence of this kind and a small congregation of Buddhist monks.

One further factor needs to be made perfectly clear before the picture of Visvabharati, with its centre in Santiniketan Asram, is in any way made complete. It has been already mentioned, how Maharshi's wish was inscribed in stone, that within the precincts of his Asram the life of birds and beasts should be held sacred and inviolate as well as that of man. This was the ancient ideal practised in the forest Asrams of India which were sanctuaries for man and beast. Rabindranath Tagore alludes to this in his book 'Creative Unity,' and refers to the hunting scene at the opening of Kalidasa's drama 'Sakuntala,' where the forest sanctuary is

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directions. Therefore, there are common studies at Visvabharati, in which men and women share alike, while there are subjects, such as child-welfare, nursing, hygiene, domestic economy, etc., in which women may be expected to take special interest.

As far as possible, the family life is maintained intact in Visvabharati by the provision of separate family quarters for teachers, who are married, and by so arranging the school quarters on the family model, that there may be a house 'father' and a house 'mother' to care for the needs of the children in each group. The girls also in the Asram have their home with a mother in charge. Greater attention is being paid to this, as Viṣvabharati develops, and the principle of the 'family group' will be extended as far it is natural and feasible to do so.

It is necessary to turn from these general considerations to certain practical details. In what follows, an attempt will be made to explain accurately the present situation, and at the conclusion to point out what

financial help is immediately needed, if the poet's expectations concerning Visvabharati are to come to fruition.

Santiniketan Asram, the central site of Visvabharati, stands on a slightly raised plateau, about 100 miles to the North-West of Calcutta, on the East Indian Railway Loop Line. The train journey from Howrah Station takes about four to five hours. The Asram has large open spaces round it of moor land, which are being gradually acquired by Visvabharati for its own future expansion. The site has been found by experience to be non-malarial, and the health conditions are generally good. The heat and moisture are not excessive, and the cold weather season is bracing. As the ground slopes away on every side and the soil is chiefly gravel, the rainfall leaves no standing water behind it.

Surul Farm is a mile and a half from Santiniketan Asram. It is, however, connected with it by a good level road across the open country. The tendency of Santiniketan itself is to spread out more

and more in this direction. A motor bus, which runs at regular intervals, has now brought the two sections of Visvabharati outwardly nearer together than before. Each year, the inner connexion also is becoming closer, and the students and teachers at Surul and Santiniketan feel themselves to be intimately one in a common fellowship of work, as members of Visvabharati.

The subjects of study and research, in the higher branches of Visvabharati, for which provision has already been made, are as follows :—

- (i) Rural reconstruction.
- (ii) Sanskrit literature, with its cognate culture.
- (iii) Buddhist philosophy and history, with a study of Pali.
- (iv) Mediæval India, with the literature of certain principal Indian languages.
- (v) Art and Music.
- (vi) English literature, with an outline of European civilisation.

It should be noted, that while students are freely admitted to Visvabharati who desire to take the equivalent of a university course, opportunities are afforded to those, who are eager to undertake research work in their special subjects of study and wish to give themselves up to the pursuit of higher learning. Such research scholars will not be expected to attend classes, but will be given personal tuition and individual attention in their studies.

One of the most important features of Visvabharati is the library at Santiniketan. This Library has received benefactions from different Governments and public bodies, including the French Government and the University of Prague. It has also been richly endowed, from the very first, by the poet himself. Having regard to its origin and development, it is one of the most remarkable libraries in India at the present time. The students of Visvabharati have all the privileges of the free daily use of this library and they find in it more and more the home of their

own reading. There is a further library of scientific works at Surul, and an art library in the Art Section.

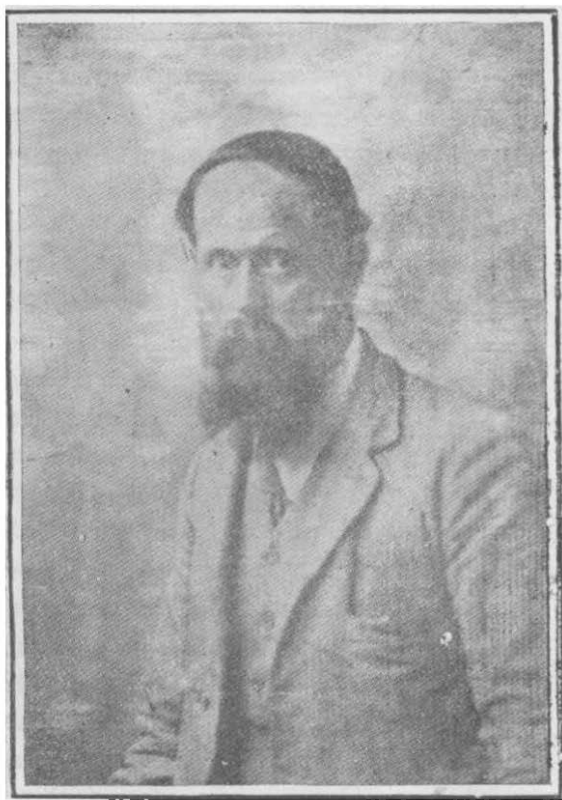
In the university branch of Visvabharati, the student's own vernacular is used in teaching wherever possible. This is comparatively easy for Bengali students, because many of the teachers are Bengalis. But it is becoming more and more obvious in practical experience, that English is a necessary common vehicle in much of the higher work. In the school, however, Bengali has always been the one medium of instruction, and so long as the larger proportion of the school children speak Bengali as their mother-tongue this medium will remain. Boys, who come to the school from other provinces, have no difficulty in picking up Bengali and in following the instruction given.

While Bengali is thus the medium of instruction in the school, a place is being found for teaching boys from other parts of India their own vernacular literature. Thus Tamil literature, Urdu literature, Gujarati literature,



Hindi literature, will be taught side by side with Bengali literature, wherever a teaching staff is available. It is also proposed to continue these vernacular studies in the higher branches of Visvabharati and to make research into the different literatures of India an integral part of the whole scheme.

The course of teaching at Surul in rural reconstruction is essentially of a practical character. The educational activity for the present centres, mainly in the villages of the neighbourhood. The village boys are either organised in the village as scouts and encouraged to start projects of one kind or another, or else are brought into the Surul Farm for short courses. In addition to this work among the village boys, there will always be a few vacancies for students who wish to come and earn their board and lodging and in return to learn self-support and be of service in the village. There is also accommodation for a few research students in rural reconstruction work. Surul students are able to attend lectures at Santiniketan on certain



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The most convenient time to join Visvabharati is after one of the two vacations. These vacations usually run from about April 20th to July 1st, and from about October 1st to November 8th. The dates given vary slightly from year to year. In the higher branches of Visvabharati, the usual time for joining is July 1st, when the new academic year begins.

The whole property of Visvabharati, including the Surul Farm, has now been handed over to the public by the poet, under a registered Constitution. It has been made into a public trust. This property, at the time of registration as a trust, under Act XXI of 1860, was valued at seven lakhs of rupees. By far the greater part of this capital amount, and also of the current expenditure for the last twenty-two years, has been contributed by the poet, Rabindranath Tagore himself. Now that he has handed over the whole of this property to the public, it will rest with them to maintain and support it. The burden had become far too heavy for a single individual to bear.

To sum up this description of Visvabharati with a statement of the more pressing financial requirements in the immediate future,—they are as follows:—

(i) For new buildings and an endowment to meet the needs of those who are coming from abroad ... 2 lakhs.

(ii) For further development of Sural Farm and extension of village work ... 1 lakh.

(iii) For endowment of chairs of Zoroastrian, Islamic, Buddhist and Jain culture with institutes attached to each chair and institute ... 2 lakhs.

(iv) For a chair of Tamil literature with its necessary equipment ... 1 lakh.

(v) For chairs of Sanskrit and Indian philosophy with necessary equipment ... 2 lakhs.

(vi) For a Dharamsala, suitable for providing hospitality to the ever increasing number of Indian guests, who come on short visits to pay a pilgrimage to the Asram. 1 lakh.

While it may be hoped, that the different religious communities will themselves subscribe for the chairs, which represent their

own religious culture, and that the development of Sural will appeal to those, who have the interest of Indian villagers at heart, generous donations are required from the public generally for the pressing need of new buildings and adequate arrangements on behalf of those who come to Santiniketan Asram from different parts of India and from every continent of the world outside. The Founder-President of Visvabharati, Rabindranath Tagore, is confident that his country will not fail in such a duty of hospitality.

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