



NETAJI SUBHAS OPEN UNIVERSITY

School of Social Sciences

DD – 26, Sector I, Salt Lake, Kolkata – 700064

Website: www.wbnsou.ac.in

Reporting of the 10th Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Memorial Lecture held on 23.01.2023

The School of Social Sciences had been entrusted to organize the Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Memorial Lectures on behalf of the University. The Tenth Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Memorial Lecture was delivered by Professor Rajat Kanta Ray, Former Vice-Chancellor, Visva-Bharati University and Emeritus Professor of History, the Presidency University on 23rd January 2023. Professor Ray is one of the outstanding historians of the country. His scholarly works have been widely acclaimed by the publications of the discipline worldwide.

The prelude

The programme unfurled through the welcome address delivered by the Registrar, Dr. Ashit Baran Aich. Our Honorable Vice Chancellor, Professor Ranjan Chakrabarti introduced the distinguished speaker and chaired the session. Professor Ray was invited to deliver the 10th Memorial Lecture on ***Under Eastern Eyes: One World and The Poet.***

The Memorial Lecture: A Short introduction

He initiated the lecture with a short discourse on globalization. He said the term was used soon after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. This event removed a principal barrier to the hegemony of multinational capital and Western civilization over the world. Earth is like a globe. It helps money to come back where it starts from. This global knowledge we owe to the oceanic voyages of Christopher Columbus to the Americas (1493), the rounding of Africa to reach India by Vasco da Gama (1497) and trip around the world by Ferdinand Magellan's fleet, which took near two years then. Untold wealth poured into Europe after this. Untold misfortunes occurred elsewhere. There was, therefore, globalization before Globalization. Tagore knew the economic and racial consequences of these voyages, but the term had not been coined. Let us, for this moment, call it proto-globalization.

Searching the alternative

The poet emphasized that enthusiasts of the globalization to take the process in a positive sense - a prosperous move towards One World. A minority of opponents, such as the US critic Saskia Sassen, have advocated alternatives to Globalization. The aim is to escape the clutch of Capital. This may no longer be possible, or even desirable. Looking at Tagore and some contemporary luminaries (such as Gandhi, Nehru and Subhas Bose) may, however, inspire us to renew the quest for alternative roads to one world, and a better one. He took a call to initiate a better road to civilization. He lamented that the global hegemony of the



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United States of America since 1991, and the more recent challenge to the USA by the pair of the Russian Federation and the Chinese People's Republic, have proceeded on the same beaten track. They both aim at encircling the planet by speeding missiles of instant money and instant arms. We live in fact in a renewed cold war, coupled with proxy hostilities (Ukraine), and nuclear threats (North Korea). He inferred that Globalization besides changing international history decisively, has affected historiography at large. The victory of Western democracy over Soviet communism was at first thought, prematurely, to have brought about the end of History. Indian historiography, too, has undergone a shift from the 'fragment' of the subalternists to the 'connection' of the Indic universalists.

Tagore's Religion of Man

The East was therefore not so much an invention as an emotional phenomenon born out of economic exploitation, racial abasement and cultural inferiorization. The sublimation of this real experience eventually produced a humanist idea of internationalism—symbolized by Tagore's **Religion of Man** and Gandhi's Oceanic circle. Their notions represented an urge to transcend the sovereign national state. They propagated a pacific and humane world bordering on neo-anarchism. The original experience was, however, raw and the East was a product of reaction to the hurtful existence of the West. Both the young Rabindranath and the adult Okakura felt the hurt. At a dinner given by a Bengali government officer in Cuttack, Rabindranath heard the English Principal of the government Ravenshaw College holding forth on the unsuitability of trial by jury in India. This was a country where the half-civilized natives were demanding the right to serve as jurors over accused Englishmen. The poet kept silent for the sake of his host, but two years later and several murders of Indians by unpunished Englishmen afterwards, he wrote 'As I read this in the newspaper, I recall the clean-shaven, hawk-nosed English Professor's contempt for Indian character and his arrogant assertion of the Englishman's superior moral awareness of the value of life. The memory brings no consolation'.

The appearance of international humanism

The beginning of a two-way ideological interaction between East and West from around 1900 stands out in the *longue durée* as a turning point in the global interface of imperialism and nationalism and the subsequent appearance of international humanism. The new internationalism came out of the changing balance of empire and nation, in which India played a critical role. The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), representing a young Indian capitalist class, gained ground against the Associated Chambers of Commerce (ASSOCHAM), the front of the established managing agency houses. The Congress pushed hard against the Raj with newly won mass support. Most importantly, the two global icons, 'Gurudeva' and 'Mahatmaji' (as the duo



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addressed each other), spread the message of India all over the world in a notable shift of the moral initiative from the West to the East.

The retreat of empire before the nation and the subsequent inter-national currency of India's spiritual mission had a link with the recognition of Tagore as a world poet, the resignation from Knighthood by the poet in protest against British military atrocities in Punjab and the virtual apology of the British Judge for convicting Mahatmaji after the Mahatma's non-violent non-cooperation with the satanic Raj. Upon receiving the news of an Asian poet getting the Nobel Prize of 1913, leading Hungarian writers predicted the end of the hegemony of European culture, the emergence of Asians in the modern world, and 'the widening of the world'.





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The paradigm change

For the world at large, Tagore, and Gandhi were spiritual humanists, but there was a difference of emphasis in their quest (*Sadhana*). The key to Rabindranath's striving was that he loved while he lived, while Mohandas tested his immunity to lust late in life. Love of nature and love of women was central to his mind. Gandhi's feeling that sex is sin was rooted deep in his psyche. In consequence Rabindranath found release in beauty and aesthetics, Mohandas in ascetic self-denial. Rabindranath explained it to Merabehn: Gandhi was the prophet of renunciation and he the poet of joy. Enconced in the same paradigm they were at the two opposite poles, with an occasional movement of the seesaw.

How are we to understand the passages of time in a changing globalizing world?

This account suggests two concepts which may be useful— generation and paradigm. Ray begun by distinguishing between the generation gap and the paradigm shift. These are quite different notions of time. Two generations and two paradigmatic *Weltanschauungen*, are not the same thing. Fathers and sons (*dui purush*) may comprehend the difference between their world views despite rapid change, but the passing of five generations (*panch purush*), or a century (20/25 years per generation) render the present generation's great-great-grandfather dysfunctional in their world. And if we undertake the passage of two centuries, like Brahmins required to recite the names of ancestors for fourteen generations (*chaudda purush*), we may find ourselves in an unknown world.



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A paradigm shift

That is what scientists call a paradigm shift. A paradigm is the framework within which a man makes sense of the world he lives in including all its polarities. A paradigm shift therefore means a transition to an altered weltanschauung in which the former differences of view cease to matter. New contradictions appear, with presupposed assumptions nor intelligible to the past age. Rabindranath designated this as 'Kalantar'. Translated by the poet himself as 'the Changing Age', this implies the interval (antar) which distances one world vision from another, and makes both incomprehensible to each other.

In lieu of a conclusion: Global history and one intuitive reality.

Global History began with the Iberian voyages to the Americas and the East Indies. We have identified the concept of Globalization with the hegemony of the USA in 1991, but that is a mere terminological convenience; the process itself had begun earlier, and may be dated back to the first voyage around the world by the fleets of Christopher Columbus and Ferdinand Magellan. The dividing line in the history of globalization is what had happened when the fate of the two hemispheres became locked, with very mixed results. Of course, two separate ecumenes had sprung up in Afro-Eurasia and the Americas long before this, but the known worlds were yet to become global. Without one geo-historic world, Rabindranath would not have set out to Latin America with the hope of exploring the vanished supremacies of Inca and Aztec and seeing for himself Hudson's Green Mansions. Instead he saw the city of Buenos Aires and the pompous that sustained its exports of meat. But then he would not have met Victoria, the real spirit of his later life and art. The generation change throws up contemporary questions and may come up with contrary answer. In the paradigm shift, these past concerns cease to matter. The questions sound immaterial, and the answers irrelevant. The globalisation process takes in both the generation and the paradigm— and makes sense in this combination.

Professor Chakrabarty concluded his lecture by contemplating that Tagore by standing at the side of his Life Deity (*Jivana Devata*), looked at the world through the eyes of his companion and this was what he had called the vision. All things past, present and future (sam-atitani, vartamani cha-Arjuna, bhavishyani cha bhutani- Bhagavad Gita) became one intuitive reality. Time seems to lie beyond history.

Formal release of the Memorial lecture and rounding off the event

His deliberation was followed by the formal release of the lecture that was published in both print and online version on this very occasion of the birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. The programme was followed by well-rounded questions and answers sessions. This was soon succeeded by the vote of thanks proposed by Dr. Ritu Mitra Mathur, Associate Professor in History, School of Social Sciences, NSOU before the august gathering. The programme



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was compered by Dr. Srabanti Choudhuri, Assistant Professor in Sociology, School of Social Sciences, NSOU. The programme came to an end by the formal closure of the week long National Research Week. It was initiated by the School of Social Sciences under the able leadership of Professor Chandan Basu, Director, School of Social Sciences on 18.01.2023 which saw vibrant presentations of research papers across the academia. Our Hon'ble Vice Chancellor, Professor Ranjan Chakrabarty announced the formal completion of the Research Week and called it a day.

Report prepared by Dr. Srabanti Choudhuri, Assistant Professor in Sociology, School of Social Sciences, NSOU