

RABINDRANATH AND THE UNIVERSITY OF CALCUTTA AN EXHIBITION

The University of Calcutta which enjoys the proud privilege of bearing Rabindranath's name on its Rolls of Honour will cherish forever the memory of a long association with Rabindranath who served as Professor and in other capacities. The ideals for which he worked throughout his life will be a source of inspiration for generations of mankind.

RABINDRANATH'S ASSOCIATION WITH THIS UNIVERSITY PRELUDE

Rabindranath's association with the University of Calcutta was very close for nearly four decades.

University conferred D.Litt. before the Nobel Prize was announced

On 26 December 1913, the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Literature was conferred on Rabindranath for his lifelong contribution to literature. Many had the idea that University of Calcutta conferred this honour on him just because he had received the Nobel Prize. But this idea is baseless. The decision to confer the Honorary Degree on the poet had been taken in the meeting of the Syndicate dated the 28th October, 1913, before the announcement of the Nobel Prize. So, there is no reason to think that honour was bestowed upon him on behalf of the University of Calcutta just because he had been honoured with the Nobel Prize.

External Expert

In 1914, Rabindranath was requested by the University to examine and report on the poem titled 'Bharat Ramani' submitted by a candidate for the Nalini Sundari Medal for 1913. Rabindranath examined and submitted his

report to the University in due time.

Invited to deliver Lectures

In 1914, Rabindranath requested W.B. Yeats to deliver lectures to the students of the University on literature.

In the year 1915, Rabindranath was invited by the University to deliver a course of lectures on a subject chosen by himself. However, the poet expressed his inability to do so because of other preoccupations.

Rabindranath : Textbook Recommendation

Rabindranath's writings, '**Gitanjali**', '**Prachin Sahitya**' '**Path-Sanchai**', '**Katha-O-Kahini**', and '**Rajarshi**' were selected as textbooks of the Matriculate, I.A. and B.A. Examinations of the University from 1919 to 1923 and afterwards.

1917 ONWARDS : INTERLUDE

Rabindranath and Taraknath Palit

In a letter in 1917, Rabindranath requested the University that he may be allowed some time to pay the sum of Rs. 30,000 which he borrowed from Taraknath Palit. It is to be mentioned that Taraknath Palit, an eminent member of the English Bar of Calcutta made over to the University assets worth 14 lakhs of rupees including his own dwelling house and the sum of rupees that people borrowed from him. Rabindranath borrowed Rs. 30,000 from Taraknath. Rabindranath wanted some more time to pay the debt. The University honoured to his request. However, as one of the debtors of Taraknath Palit, Rabindranath had repaid in full the principal and interest to the University of Calcutta in May 1917.

Awards : Jagattarini Gold Medal

In 1921, Rabindranath received the Jagattarini Gold Medal from the University. The Jagattarini Gold Medal, awarded to great litterateurs in memory of Asutosh's mother, is considered to be one of the highest distinctions of the University. Rabindranath was its first recipient.

Other Activities : University of Calcutta and Visva-Bharati

In 1922, at the request of Rabindranath, the students of the school department of Visva-Bharati were admitted to the Matriculation Examination of the University of Calcutta.

Examiner (External)

Rabindranath was an External Examiner in the M.A. Examination in Bengali of the University for the year 1925.

Expert Member : Selection Committee

In the year 1932, Rabindranath was nominated as one of the experts in the Selection Committee for the appointment of the Bageswari Professor on Indian Fine Arts.

Kamala Lecture : Manusher Dharma

In 1932, the poet was invited by the University to deliver the 'Kamala Lecture'. Responding to this call, Rabindranath, on the 16th, 18th, and 20th of January 1933, delivered lectures on *Manusher Dharma*. It was later published in the form of a book.

Rabindranath and Asutosh

Rabindranath had high admiration for Asutosh. In the words of Rabindranath, “Asutosh had that magic voice of assurance. He had the courage to dream because he had the power to fight and the confidence to win - his will itself was the path to the goal ... it had been possible for him to dream of the miracle of introducing a living heart behind the steel frame-work made in the doll factory of bureaucracy.”

It was because of Sir Asutosh that the poet took keen interest in the activities of the University from time to time.

Adjudicator of Ph.D. Thesis

In 1937, Rabindranath agreed to act as an adjudicator of a Ph.D. thesis. The thesis entitled *Chaitanyachariter Upadan*, submitted by Bimanbihari Majumdar, was written in Bengali. This was the first time that the University of Calcutta accepted a thesis written in Bengali language.

Rabindranath's Convocation Address in Bengali

Rabindranath was invited to preside over the University's convocation in the year 1937. Shyamaprasad Mookerjee was the Vice-Chancellor. At that time those who had the honour of presiding over the convocation were either a person related to the University authorities or a highly ranked government official. In the history of convocation of the University of Calcutta before independence, the first person to be invited who did not possess either of these attributes was Rabindranath. In the annals of the University this was an epoch-making event. An outstanding feature of this convocation was Rabindranath's delivery of the speech in Bengali. At the time, no one could even imagine that in any University in India, anyone could deliver speech in mother-tongue – Rabindranath made this happen.

Thus, the glory that was founded by Rabindranath for the Bengali language will be forever remembered by the people of Bengal with gratitude and happiness.

Rabindranath accepts Professorship

Rabindranath, in 1932, was appointed as a Professor in the University.

After assuming the post of University Professor, Rabindranath delivered two lectures entitled *Viswavidyalayer Roop* and *Sikshar Bikiran*. In the first lecture, after making comparative analysis of the forms of the ancient and contemporary Indian universities, he pointed out what the form of an ideal university should be. In the second lecture, he said that education for a privileged few was meaningless, that only universal education can move the country forward. These two speeches earned the commendation of the countrymen and remain equally relevant at present. He wanted to connect all the countrymen through language and literature.

The Poet appeals to the University for acceptance of mother tongue Bengali as medium of instruction

“বাংলা যার ভাষা সেই আমার তৃষিত মাতৃভূমির হয়ে বাংলার বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের কাছে চাতকের মতো উৎকণ্ঠিত বেদনায় আবেদন জানাচ্ছি— তোমার অভ্রভেদী শিখর চূড়া বেষ্টন করে পুঞ্জ পুঞ্জ শ্যামল মেঘের প্রসাদ আজ বর্ষিত হোক ফলে শস্যে, সুন্দর হোক পুষ্পে পল্লবে, মাতৃভাষার অপমান দূর হোক, যুগশিক্ষার উদ্বেল ধারা বাঙালীচিত্তের শুষ্ক নদীর রিক্ত পথে বান ডাকিয়ে বয়ে যাক, দুই কূল জাগুক পূর্ণ চেতনায়, ঘাটে ঘাটে উঠুক আনন্দধবনি”। –শিক্ষার বিকিরণ (1933)

University Songs composed by the Poet

In 1937 when Syamaprasad Mookerjee was the Vice-Chancellor, he requested Rabindranath to compose a song to be adopted as the University song of the University of Calcutta. Rabindranath had composed two songs instead

of one. They were:

1. *Chalo Jai, Chalo Jai*
2. *Subho Karmapathe Dharo Nirvayo Gaan*

The first one, *Chalo Jai, Chalo Jai* was sung by the students of the University at a Parade and March-past on 24 January, 1937. On the occasion of the Post-centenary Golden Jubilee Celebrations, the Syndicate of the University decided to accept the song *Subho Karmapathe Dharo Nirvayo Gaan* as the new University song.

The Sun Sets In

Rabindranath died on the 7th August, 1941. By his death India lost one of her greatest sons and the greatest poet of the age. After his death the Syndicate and the Senate of the University in expressing their deepest sense of sorrow at the death of the poet placed on record the following:-

‘Through him India has given her message to mankind and his unique achievements in the fields of Literature, Philosophy, Education and Arts have won imperishable fame for himself and have raised the status of India in the estimation of the world.’

The 18th August, 1941 was observed as a holiday in all institutions under the University and a circular was issued to all the institutions with the request that meeting may be held on that day on the life and teachings of the poet.

**Matters stated above are documented with official records
in this exhibition**