

**SPEECH OF THE UNION FINANCE MINISTER SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE DELIVERED ON
70TH DEATH ANNIVERSARY OF LATE RABINDRANATH TAGORE
'REMEMBERING RABINDRANATH TAGORE'
AT NATIONAL MUSEUM AUDITORIUM, NEW DELHI,
ON 8 AUGUST 2011: 1700-1745 HRS**

Honourable Minister of Culture, Kumari Selja,
Chairman, Sangeet Natak Akademi, Shrimati Leela Samson,
Secretary, Ministry of Culture, Jawahar Sircar,
Distinguished guests

This is a sombre moment: As I stand here, on the 71st Purnima Tithi of Rabindranath Tagore, I can see the opening shot of Satyajit Ray's iconic documentary film on the poet which, fifty years ago, received a coveted award at the Locarno film festival in Switzerland. As the carriage in which Rabindranath lay, wreathed in flowers, crawled through the mass of humanity, swirling all around with grief, the baritone voice of Satyajit Ray came out with the words:

“On the 7th of August, 1941, a man died in Calcutta. His mortal frame perished in flames, but he left behind a legacy of words and music, of art and thought, that will be cherished for a long time to come.”

These are simple words that reach deep into the life of an extraordinary creator.

2) It required not much foresight to declare that Tagore’s work would be cherished for long. At the same time, its truth is evident after the passage of a century and half that separates us from his birth in 1861. Clearly, Tagore matters, and matters over an even larger field than he had commanded seventy years ago. In the intervening years, his work has dispersed widely in the country and abroad, wafted by the winds, so to speak. This process has been hastened by the freedom from copyright on his work: Tagore is now totally in the public domain.

3) He was an activist. When he found, the colonial education system was destroying the talent, creativity of the people of India, he established the great institutions of Shantiniketan where all ideas, thoughts, philosophy were allowed to be blown uninterruptedly. This Ashram school later became a Central University with a distinction of Prime Minister of India as its Chancellor starting from Jawaharlal Nehru today. The basic motto of the University '**Yatra visvam bhavatyekanidam**', where the world makes a home in a single nest.

4) He was a traveler – a real Parivrajaka. He travelled the continents of Europe, America, Latin America, East and Far East. Everywhere he discovered the relation between man and man. To him artificial barriers of border, domicile, and religion cannot separate one human being from other. He believed in universal brotherhood throughout his life and through his writings, he preached this ideal. Imperial aggressions, brutal forces, mercantile greed, are not enemies to any individual country or society or religion but it is an aggression on humanity itself.

Therefore, there is no wonder, he writes in 'Light of Asia', when Korea suffers from imperial aggression. When the brutal colonial power exploits and destroys the spirit of African continent, his pain and agony are manifested abundantly. Simply, he was a universal humanist.

5) However, a creator *lives* in the public domain not by legal provision, but because his work finds resonance in the hearts and minds of the public. So it has been with Rabindranath's work. The key to its success with new generations of readers, listeners, and viewers is the usefulness it holds for every section of people. But if thoughts alone were all that Tagore had to offer, he would be just another didactic and a very worthy writer. But Tagore was not just a visionary or an ideologue. He was a narrator of the story of life, and the herald of a better and possible future.

This narrative flowed out of him copiously through various channels – poetry, fiction, music, dance, drama and finally painting – clothed in forms of beauty. Exhausting the possibilities of one medium, he seems to have reached for another, never stopping in his quest till the last. It is thus that he bequeathed to us his legacy of word and song.

6) Music was central to Tagore's soul, and he sensed through it an order of things beyond the mundane world. I can do no better than to quote the poet before I close this brief address:

“Deep in the heart of this universe of creation and immanent with it, there is a kind of throbbing of life. Music conveys to us a feeling of this heart-throb of universal harmony. Life of Man as a whole forms part of this great symphony . . . The sun, the moon, the planets and the stars, the trees and herbs – all of them contribute their tune to this great music of the Universe.”

7) The National Committee, that has been set up under the Prime Minister, with several other noted personalities and experts, have given their advice. The National Implementation Committee, which I have the honour of chairing, has then laid down precise tasks, projects and programmes, to commemorate the everlasting genius of Tagore. I congratulate the Ministry of Culture and other Ministries and organizations for carrying out this task, with so much sincerity and in such a grand manner.

8) As we pay our tribute to this great man, we would do well to remember his was an existence, that was enhanced by beauty and a harmony that arose from the interplay of all the finest elements and aesthetics, that the world can bestow on a worthy son.

Thank you.

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