

**Excerpts from Parliamentary Debates,  
1951 and 1971**

*Deliberations in  
The Provisional Parliament  
on  
The Visva-Bharati Bill*

**28 April, 1951**

The Minister of Education (Maulana Azad) :  
(Speaking in Urdu)

*...As a matter of fact, by passing this Bill, we are giving it nothing new or anything which it has not achieved already. What is it then that we want to declare by passing this Bill? There are two things, first of these is to recognize that the institution has national importance. Whether we declare it to be as such today or not and whether we acknowledge it or not, the fact remains that this is an institution of national importance. The other object of the Bill is to give official recognition to it as a university...*

*...I recall in this connection what Mahatma Gandhi had told me in 1947. When in January 1947, I took over the charge of the Ministry of Education, Mahatma Gandhi had told me that he had a keep-safe of Gurudev with him... that it was a precious thing kept with him and that it was his desire to hand it over to the Government of India. I feel a pleasure in having this opportunity, although somewhat delayed, to set the Government of India's seal on the preservation of this institution...*

Seth Govind Das :  
(Speaking in Hindi)

*...While on one hand I welcome the present Bill, on the other hand, I wish to make it clear that we have to be very careful and alive in this regard. Had such a Bill been passed in the life-time of Rabindra Babu, no such care and attention would have been required, for then we would have been guided by his own personality. Personality is regarded as the greatest thing in the world. But today he is not alive. Unfortunately our country has been constantly losing great men like him... What I am afraid of is lest a day should come when, despite the fact that we are today welcoming such a measure, we may, begin to feel that by passing such a Bill we had simply hampered the progress of an independent institution like Visva-Bharati. Now that Rabindra Babu is no more with us we are required to pay still more attention to this fact. Some time after the passing of this Bill we should review the whole situation as to how the affairs of Visva-Bharati are being managed; and if, after such a review, any amendment be deemed necessary in the Bill, it may suitably be incorporated...*

Shri A. C. Guha :

*...there is one thing of which I would like to remind the Government and Maulana Sahib, that by giving the charter of a University, we may not petrify the spirit of the University; that by giving the charter to the institution, we may not give it the shape of a stony edifice in the place of the moral and spiritual force that the institution has so long been. I appeal to the Government and also to those persons to whom the care of this institution will be given, that they may see to it that the ideal with which Rabindranath Tagore has been working, the ideal according to which he*

*has developed this institution may not be submerged under this edifice of a formal university. It is more than a national institution; it is an institution of much more than national importance as has been enunciated in the Bill. It is an institution, for some years, of international importance. It is an institution having a peculiar characteristic of its own. Any one who has gone to that institution can see that the classes are being held sometimes in the open air, without any formal class room and all these things. The institution has been developed deliberately by Rabindranath Tagore with a rural bias and to give it a rural bias, he developed also the Sri Niketan...*

**30 April, 1951**

Dr. C. D. Deshmukh :

*...Coming to the structure of the Bill I must say that I am totally disappointed. I have not only had the experience of being a member of various executive councils of Universities, I have also had the good fortune of belonging to not less than six Universities all over the world, three in India and three in England. I have therefore some knowledge of not only the structure of Universities but of the way in which a University works. And my prejudice against the constitution of this Visva-Bharati into another kind of University of the very same type as exist in India is based on experience and intimate knowledge of the working of these Universities. That is the reason why in my opinion the conversion of the Visva-Bharati into such other University is not very desirable. Because what we are creating is a sort of hum-drum institution which is daily being debased all over India. There is neither any cultural advancement nor any encouragement to culture and learning to speak of. Most things are done in a sort of a routine manner on the basis of very common considerations. And if we retain the structure of the Bill, I am afraid the idea with which the Visva-Bharati was created will not have much of an opportunity to develop...I am sorry to say that none of the important things which were the objects in creating and establishing Visva-Bharati find any place whatsoever in the structure of the Bill. Not only that, I go further and say that if you have the organization you are suggesting in the Bill there can be no scope whatsoever – I say it deliberately, purposely and understanding fully what I mean – for any of the objects which were before Rabindranath Tagore being achieved. The main object of Rabindranath Tagore was “to study the mind of Man in its realization of the different aspects of truth from diverse points of view.” Where is the “mind of Man” in this Bill and where is any mention of “truth” let alone its various aspects? Then, the second object is “to bring into more intimate relation with one another through patient study and research the different cultures of the East and the basis of their underlying unity.” The third object is “to approach the West from the standpoint of such unity of life and thought of Asia.” There is some mention of “bringing together the cultures of the East and the West”, but I assure you... that under the structure of a University there can be no place whatever for this object because the more learned and the more cultured will never approach such an institution where everything has to be governed by Ordinances, Statutes and regulations; everything has to be done by means of Selection Committees and by advertisements. I am sure there are ample Universities which are doing these things however excellent. My point is that Rabindra Nath Tagore’s Shanti Niketan was intended to be a place where only the really learned would enter and not the certificate-walas and the Matriculates (even if all of them stand in the First Class) and others who go there only to obtain some sort of a Degree and nothing more...*

*...What will happen, if this Bill is passed can easily be imagined. We shall certainly have hundreds of students who will be studying all sorts of subjects. There will be people offering various subjects and getting their B.As., M.As, and Ph.Ds probably. But can the Maulana Saheb point out to me a provision whereby this Visva-Bharati will be anything distinct or different from*

*other Universities? I am afraid that the whole paraphernalia of the present Universities based on an imitation of foreign Universities will be strengthened and perpetuated. There is nothing original, nothing that is really in consonance with the ideas of the founder. Time and again, the University Commission has pointed out that we have many Universities which have done very good work, but they are all hackneyed...*

Maulana Azad :  
(Speaking in Urdu)

*...Some of my friends have stressed the point that the ideal for which Visva-Bharati was founded should remain intact and that it should not be allowed to develop into a University like other Universities in the country. I am glad to note that they have a full consciousness of the fact but I think it was not quite necessary for them to have emphasized that point so much for the Government themselves have that objective fully in view. Let me now tell you in greater detail how the Government felt induced to bring forward this Bill. The Government was aware of the importance of this institution and was anxious to ensure for it a stable future. But it was unable to decide what method should be adopted for doing that. In the meantime our friends of the Santiniketan made a proposal that it should be given the form of a Central University. They thought that it was the only proper course for safeguarding the future of this institution. The Government did not accept that proposal straightaway but kept thinking over it for a fairly long time. Personally, I was eager for the Government of India to do everything in their power for its protection. I had made a promise to Mahatmaji on that score and it was my duty to fulfil that promise at the earliest. But the basic question that confronted me was, "what does 'protection' signify, is it the protection of the body or of the spirit?" Any safeguard that might provide it physical protection but ignore the protection of its spirit was not acceptable either to me or to my colleagues. If we were to make it safe physically but let its spirit be lost this would have been no protection but rather destruction. I fully apprised my friends of Santiniketan of these views of mine. We made it clear to them that the Government could agree to give it the status of a Central University only on the condition that its existing educational set up remains intact and should not be changed in any manner. Our friends of Santiniketan assured us that they were also moved by the same objective, that they were in no case prepared to allow any change in its educational ideals and set-up, and that all that they desired was that it should be granted the status of a Central University and its national importance admitted and that the Central Government should assume responsibility for its maintenance in the future. When the Government felt fully satisfied on that score it decided to draft the present Bill and to bring it before the House. This Bill declares that the institution named Visva-Bharati which was established by Rabindranath Tagore for special objects is recognized as a University. Now this means that this institution, as it stands, is recognized as University. The Bill simply gives it the status of a University and does not make any other change...*

**1 May, 1951**

Dr. S. P. Mookerjee :

*...This Bill obviously covers the cases of colleges which means institutions after the matriculation stage. According to the Secondary Education Bill which has been passed in West Bengal recently, all high schools in West Bengal will come under the control of the Board. Then what happens to the schools situated in Santiniketan? I am definitely of the view that this Bill will never succeed and Visva-Bharati will never succeed unless you allow Visva-Bharati to maintain its own schools right from the kindergarten stage. There is a new type of secondary education*

*which has been imparted at Santiniketan which in fact, was a special gift of Rabindranath Tagore. That is how Santiniketan's activities started. Unless the child is taken up at the very initial stage it will be impossible to maintain Visva-Bharati at the proper standard. We cannot do that if we allow the University control only over the colleges. I know the Education Minister's intervention is all right. He wants Visva-Bharati to prosper according to the ideals of its founder. If that is his intention and the intention of Parliament and of the whole country, I suggest Government might have a small amendment and add "schools" also so that the position may be clear beyond any doubt whatsoever....*

Maulana Azad :  
(Speaking in Urdu)

*This Bill has been prepared in consultation with the Visva-Bharati authorities and they did not lay any emphasis on schools. But I know that education of school standard is also being given there and I have no objection if word 'school' is added to it*

Dr. Deshmukh :

*...I would really have preferred not to make this institution a hum drum sort of an institution which we are doing at present. All the objects embodied in the Bill may be very good, desirable, advisable; but they can be easily separated and only the ideals laid down by Rabindranath Tagore should have been kept, because apart from anything else he insisted not merely on a particular plan of work but he laid emphasis on "the simplicity of the externals". He knew that the soul of philosophers and thinkers could not properly be housed in huge structures of cement, concrete and steel. It could only prosper if the surroundings answer the urges and stirrings of a great soul. That is why he deliberately used the words "simplicity in externals". He did not want surroundings of a very mundane nature which may spoil the harmony of the atmosphere of this place. I have no doubt he was right. Once you pass this Bill, all this will go...*

Dr. S. P. Mookerjee :

*...I had during the last few weeks, personally discussed with many people whom I met when they expressed their misgivings as regards the ultimate results which may follow the establishment of a statutory University at Santiniketan. The fear generally expressed was that the University might become just a stereotyped institution of the like that we have in different parts of the country. I know that the Maulana Sahib was anxious from the beginning, as in fact he has made it abundantly clear today, that the intention of Government is to maintain intact the great ideals for which the founder stood. For that reason the clarification of the objectives in the words of the founder himself is essential. I knew personally how the mind of Rabindranath Tagore worked with regard to Government control and Government interference regarding Visva-Bharati. As you know, Sir, years ago the institution at Santiniketan was completely independent and I vividly remember the day when he came to meet my revered father who was then in charge of the affairs of the Calcutta University and made a suggestion as regards possible cooperation, between Calcutta University and Visva-Bharati, maintaining intact the complete academic freedom of Visva-Bharati, although the Indian Universities Act did not make such cooperation possible. Yet a certain device was made and Visva-Bharati has worked during the last 30 years as an institution where work of a special kind was being accomplished and at the same time its students were being permitted to sit at the examinations of the University of Calcutta. Rabindranath's great fear was that if the University came under official control, then its very purpose would become difficult of accomplishment. In fact, as he said in one of his great speeches, its soul was likely to be destroyed. Those who are acquainted with his great writings know of that story which*

he wrote of a bird which was kept in a golden cage, beautifully served but not allowed to go out of the cage and how money was lavishly spent on the maintenance of the golden cage which was studded with jewels and how fruits not fresh from the nature's garden but artificial food-stuff were brought into the cage so that the bird might develop its own life as the king thought it should. Later on everyone was anxious about the external features of the cage but the poor bird had died and no one took any notice of it. That is how he described the system of education prevalent in this country. He abhorred nothing more than external restrictions and regimentation. It is for this reason that we have to be extremely careful that the objectives of this University should be very clearly laid down by statute and also a constitution should be given to it which would enable it to function properly and make it impossible for any Government to interfere with its internal working...Rabindranath Tagore always used to say, freedom must be the very breath and life of this institution. We should do nothing to destroy that freedom or do anything to regiment the working of this institution. I am fully aware that even though you may pass this Bill, and you lay down with clarity the conditions for keeping its constitution free and unfettered, everything will ultimately depend on how far Visva-Bharati succeeds in collecting within its doors the right type of men and women to carry out the work of the institution. Theirs will be a great responsibility. And if Visva-Bharati attracts the men and women of the right type – and they are not easily available – they by their concerted and united efforts and harmonious endeavours can succeed in making this Bill actually effective. It is only then that our purpose will be served. That is a responsibility which we are throwing on Visva-Bharati; and I have not the least doubt in my mind that with the cooperation of all, although it is situated in one corner of India, with the cooperation of all people from all parts of India and the great thinkers and savants from the different parts of the world, we will be able to make this institution worthy of its name...

**3 May, 1951**

The Prime Minister and Minister of External Affairs (Shri Jawaharlal Nehru) :

...I possess, without being worthy of it...the Chancellorship of Visva-Bharati. We have looked upon this not only as a very great institution but as a very special and unique institution and we are particularly anxious that it should not fall into the rut of other Universities. We are anxious, if I may say so, that our Education Department should not try to bring about any regimentation of it in line with others. The chief business of the Government of India or the Education Ministry will be to help it to develop on its own lines naturally to see that any falling off in standards, according to its own standards, does not take place, or any deterioration so far as we can help it – but generally to allow it to develop according to its own genius or according, as far as possible, to the vision that the great Poet had...

I feel a little embarrassed at having to occupy a position like that of the Chancellor of Visva-Bharati. Because whatever virtues I might possess, I am painfully conscious of a lack of virtue in so far as the qualities for a Chancellorship of such an institution are concerned, apart also from the fact that I am rather fully occupied otherwise, and can give very little time to it. But whether I give much time to it or not, I have all along felt not only a very deep interest but a very special obligation to the memory of the Poet and, if I may say so, it was due to a promise I made to him – or rather to my acceptance of his direction in this matter – that I feel that I ought to do my utmost for the growth of this magnificent idea to which he gave birth...

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Excerpts  
from

*the speech of Professor Hiren Mukerji in  
Lok Sabha  
on  
The Visva-Bharati (Amendment) Bill, 1971*

**29 November, 1971**

Professor Hiren Mukerji :

*...I am reminded of the last speech which Jawaharlal Nehru had made to the inmates of Visva-Bharati and Shri Nurul Hasan can discover a tape recording of it in Santiniketan – where he had referred to Visva-Bharati's special mission. He had pointed to the tall buildings and growing affluence of the institution as something about which one should beware, and had added – I am quoting the exact words he spoke in Hindi :*

lekin sarkar se thoda alag rahana chahiye

*...I do not say that we should stick to Tagore's ideas and all that sort of thing. If they are outmoded, as they might very well be, if Santiniketan should no longer carry on in the old fashion, if Shri Jawaharlal Nehru's idea towards Santiniketan ought to be repudiated, no longer passes muster, let us find out, let us have a civilized intellectual discourse in regard to that matter. Let there be an investigation made by competent people. Let Tagore's ideals be thrown overboard if they are no longer in conformity with the requirements of today. But have we made that investigation?*

*...For the last two to three years, Government has been entirely negligent in regard to every demand that has come from the public as well as from the students and teachers of Visva-Bharati for a genuine probe into its affairs. Government has acted only in order to support the idea of that clique which, in the name of representing the ex-students of Santiniketan, wants to control that institution...*