

Welcome Address by Gopalkrishna Gandhi, Chairman on the Occasion of the Inauguration of the Tagore Centre

Esteemed Rashtrapati ji, Honourable Governor of Himachal Pradesh, Honourable Chief Minister, Dignitaries in the audience, Honourable Lok Ayukta, Professor deSouza, the Director of the Institute, Professor Chetan Singh, the member of the Governing Board, Professor Tridip Suhrud, Dr Uma Das Gupta, distinguished Fellows of the Institute, ladies and gentlemen.

It is my privilege to welcome you, esteemed Rashtrapati, to this Institute.

Nothing could be more appropriate for a Tagore Centre housed in what was the residence of the Governors General and the first two Presidents of India and a space that was gifted to the nation and, indeed, to the world of scholarship by President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, to be opened by you, Sir, the President and the First Citizen of India and yourself, a teacher and Tagore scholar of distinction.

The Tagore Centre has come to us as a gift, as large as it was unexpected.

As Union Finance Minister, you must have doubtlessly played a part in giving that gift to us, as to many other institutions.

Too little money cripples institutions. Too much of it can also harm. There is such a thing as 'too good to be good'.

But we assure you, Sir, that we will not have it said of the Centre, after the Bangla saying, "*Aeto bhalo, bhalo noi*".

I assure you, Sir, we shall use this largesse with the humility of the deserving rather than the excitement of the fortunate.

We shall also do so with sincere respect for the man in whose memory it has been given, not in blind adulation of him. He would not approve of worship.

Was he unprecedented? I cannot say he was.

Was he original? Every leaf, every stone, each individual is that.

Was he without equals, alternatives, peers in his time? He was not. Bankim and Saratchandra in his own Province, Iqbal, Premchand and Mahadevi in the North, Vallathol, Bharati and Kuvempu in the South, were substantial figures, measure for measure.

But he was something else.

That itself is an expression, is it not, Rashtrapati.

Tagore was 'something else'. He had the fire of the Philosopher's Stone.

His *aguner parasmani*, which Dr Uma Das Gupta has helped me understand, will strengthen the Institute's wider enquiries.

We are somewhere mid-way in the first quarter of the 21st century; getting used to being millennium people. But nothing millennial seems to elevate us.

We swing between a motherland wanting to become a fatherland, between a senior civilization wanting to become a super-power, between a scatter of villages wanting to become agglomerations of suburbia, between a social epic wanting to turn into an economic thriller. We have been set, as a people, on a journey by many well-meaning guides who want us to share their favourite enthusiasms—urbanisation for one, globalisation for another, industrialisation for yet another, modernisation, weaponisation, gigantism, nano-ism, but we seem to lack both the excitement of great departures or the thrills of momentous arrivals.

We are passengers huddled in an inbetween-ness, unsure of the destination, personal or collective, towards which we are hurtling. We wait for an announcement over a malfunctioning public address system that will summon us to a millennium but we are not millennial people. We are people made by many millennia. And so, we wait for the light that will lead us, red turning green or the other way around. We are the amber people, the crossroads people, waiting in faith, often in prayer,

mostly in dismay. There, on the razor's edge of our uncertainties, Gurudeva becomes us.

In times that are menaced by lust of money and more money especially among the well-moneyed, short-term greeds causing long-term harm, by a disregard of Nature's laws and Nature's limits, by callousness towards those in need of human care, by irreverence for the sanctity of each other's faiths and feelings and in times when the highest and the best in India co-exists with the worst and the coarsest in human nature, such as in our

maltreatment of women, of children, of persons with psychological disabilities—especially in government-run Mental Homes as they are still unfortunately called—of prisoners and at times when the most hideous custodial torture of suspects and accused goes on without any abatement in our seventh decade of freedom, may the Parasmani that Tagore saw touch our *prana* .

Rashtrapatiji, we offer you thanks; we offer you welcome in more than mere formality. We do so in faith.