

RABINDRANATH TAGORE AND RURAL INDUSTRIALIZATION**

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I feel greatly honoured to have been invited to deliver a lecture dedicated to the memory of Professor Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis. I thank the Adhyaksha PSB for all the arrangements today. I wish to pay my homage to the memory of Professor Mahalanobis by first recounting briefly his association with Santiniketan.

It is a feeling of nostalgia that has overtaken me for two reasons – firstly, my statistics background sets a natural association with the Father of Statistics in India and secondly, our common bondage with this great institution. Frankly, with the latter realization at the back of my mind, I have always experienced a much closer link with Gurudeva Rabindranath Tagore through the Professor, as Prasanta Chandra used to be referred to in the ISI circles.

The relationship between Gurudeva and Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis was as intimate as it could be between two members of a family. The busy scientist as Professor Mahalanobis was, he never lacked in detailed bibliographic information about Gurudeva's works; in fact, he was the first person to prepare an index of Gurudeva's writings at a time when it was difficult even to collect together the writings that appeared in various magazines and journals. Gurudeva would even simply refer all those who would have queries about his works over to the Professor by saying that Prasanta knows better.

*Professor Mahalanobis was born on June 29, 1893 in a family, which was linked through his grand father with the nineteenth century renaissance in Bengal. It is quite widely acknowledged that Raja Ram Mohun Roy and Gurudeva Rabindranath Tagore stand firmly at the two ends of the history of the new awakening. Professor Mahalanobis sensed in Gurudeva the complete and comprehensive realization of Ram Mohun's search for upliftment and emancipation of human mind. Gurudeva observed, "Ram Mohun was the only person in his time in the whole world of man to realize completely the significance of Modern Age. He knew the ideal of civilization does not lie in the isolation of independence, but in the brotherhood of interdependence of individuals...". According to Gurudeva, Raja Ram Mohun was his "hero" in life; likewise, Professor Mahalanobis had two heroes in life – Raja Ram Mohun Roy and Gurudeva Rabindranath Tagore. In one of his many recounting, Professor Mahalanobis describes Tagore's humanism by saying "... For him, true freedom lies in the growth of personality from the life of the flesh to the life of the spirit which finds its supreme expression in the divinity of Man the Eternal." Professor Mahalanobis was not a student of Gurudeva's **Brahmacharya Ashram**, but had the opportunity to know him from close quarters for over thirty years. Young Prasanta Chandra had occasions to listen to Tagore at the **Sadharan Brahmo Samaj** and was attracted to him. His attachment with Gurudeva was unbounded; he started visiting the Poet at Santiniketan since 1910 when he was only a third year student. Later, in 1921, he was appointed a Joint Secretary of the Visva-Bharati Society together with the Poet's son Rathindranath Tagore and he continued in that capacity for 10 years ; but the informal relationship with Visva-Bharati continued. Both Prasanta Chandra and his illustrious wife Nirmalkumari accompanied Gurudeva in many of his trips including trips abroad. We find ample indications of the great deal of confidence and dependence that Tagore reposed in his Prasanta and Nirmalkumari, though Prasanta Chandra was never a*

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blind worshipper and approver of Gurudeva's ideas and activities. We know that it is around then that the internationally renowned Indian Statistical Institute was also taking shape in Professor's mind. This great architect of the planning process in post-independence India was by the side of Gurudeva at a time when various ideas not only on education but also on rural reconstruction were crossing through his mind. Professor Mahalanobis referred to Tagore's involvement in the massive nationalist movement and remarked, "He looked upon this movement not as a narrow, purely political agitation, but as a great opportunity for constructive work for the reorganization of society. He was convinced that our real problem centered around villages." Indeed, Tagore had said "It is not enough to try to remove wants; you can never remove them completely from the outside, the far greater thing is to rouse the will of the people to remove their own wants." Professor Mahalanobis remarked in one of his numerous writings on Tagore as follows, "He recommended that bands of workers should be organized to give a new objective to village life; to build schools, roads, water reservoirs, grazing commons and the like; to go from village to village with new compositions of yatra (folk drama) and songs and magic lanterns and cinema; deliver lectures on sanitation, arrange exhibitions of handmade goods and agricultural produce; and try to unit Hindus and Muslims as well as the rich and poor in common endeavours for welfare. In 1913, he purchased some lands at Surul village (near Santiniketan) to start experiments in agriculture, cattle breeding, and village arts and crafts, which developed a few years later into Sriniketan, the Institute of Rural Reconstruction.

It would be recognized that the ideas which Tagore had expounded more than fifty years ago, now form in many ways the basic principles of the Community Project movement in India; and the importance of rural reconstruction is being increasingly recognized political leaders of the country. It is also worth mentioning that about 60 years ago Tagore (although himself belonging to a family of landlords) had advocated the abolition of the landlord system (zamindari based on permanent settlement) with redistribution of land. Tagore was also a strong advocate of agricultural co-operatives. The ideas have now been accepted by the Government of India, and it is hoped that vigorous efforts would be made to implement them at an early date."
