

“JAGADISH CHANDRA BOSE”*

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Editor's note : This is the authorized translation by Surendranath Tagore of the reaction Rabindranath Tagore expressed to the students at Santiniketan on receiving the news of death of J. C. Bose. This was published in The Modern Review Vol. LXIII, January-December 1938. The article will help readers to directly read the mind of the Poet in regard to scientists and science in general and to Jagadish Chandra Bose in particular.

When youthful Jagadishchandra, the unknown enthusiast, first set out along the arduous road to fame, beset as it was with wearisome obstacles at every step, I proclaimed both in prose and verse my unquenchable faith in his eventual attainment. In this day of bereavement, I have not the same strength of voice to pay tribute to his resplendent memory. For it is but a short while ago that the call came to me to voyage to the same unknown bourne. I was fated to return but my body and mind are still clouded by its mists, and I feel as if my friend, who has gone before, has left for me his invitation to follow. At any rate, I cannot have long to bear the sorrow of our separation.

The sorrow is not mine alone, but is shared by the whole country. And yet it is not as though his pursuit in the realm of science was abandoned, unfinished, – of its results the world is not deprived by his leaving it; that which is unfading, immortal in his achievement remains to us. His absence in the flesh but makes the gains of his spirit more vivid, – the truths revealed by his work are a bequest that will become more fully ours. For me, personally, there remains the consolation that what the friendship urged, I was enabled to do; what further was in my power to give as poet I offered when that power was at its height, and my salutation to his genius remains enshrined in my poems.

Science and literature occupy different apartments in the edifice of culture, but there are connecting passages through which offerings may be exchanged, and of these Jagadish made constant use; wherefore it became possible for the Scientist and the Poet, to be in close communion. Science, it is true, had but little room in my work, – none the less it occupied a larger space in my thoughts, and the same was the case with Jagadish in regard to literature. So the windows of the minds of both of us were ever open for an interchange of atmosphere. And another thing that brought us together was the love of our motherland.

Life lies invisible in some hidden recess in the depths of matter. The hope that the researches of Jagadish would some day place this truth on a scientific foundation intoxicated me with joyful anticipations, for I had from childhood been familiar with the teaching of our Rishis: “All these which are the process of creation flow from and are vibrant with life.” Of that all-pervading vibration Science was becoming more and more cognisant, but it had not been able to gather into its storehouse of facts any proof of its identity with life. So when the experiments of Jagadish began to disclose the life-like responses of matter, I felt that the day of the recognition of this truth by Science could not be far distant.

Then Jagadish brought the resources of his laboratory to bear on the vegetable world where, though the existence of life was not in doubt, a difference of kind had been taken for granted. Exquisite was the delicacy of the apparatus that proved its no less wonderful power to probe the secrets of vegetable life; and our explorer awaited with

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infinite patience the messages of the similarity with animal life of its workings, as they came to be yielded up.

I had not the scientific equipment to follow his conclusions in detail, and my untutored imagination may have leaped beyond inferences warranted by the facts; still, I believe, my unbounded enthusiasm afforded my friend real delight though, perhaps, not unmixed with a quizzical amusement. Competent appraisers amongst his visitors were rare in those days, and the stimulating breeze of my unstinted wonderment may have been of help to speed the barque of his endeavour on its way. My unfaltering belief in Jagadish's success added strength, I am sure, to his own conviction as to the reality of the goal of his quest.

So far (*is*) for the first chapter. In the next, our professor accompanied by his worthy helpmate, went off on an expedition over the seas to announce the truths he had gathered and offer them to the scrutiny of expert criticism. Then was my mind filled with a rapturous foretaste of the glory that awaited our motherland in the appreciation of the genius of her gifted son in foreign lands. And as acute was my distress when I learnt that money difficulties were standing in the way of Jagadish's expected victory; for had I not my bitter experience of how sadly achievement could be by mere lack of material resources? For that very reason my own means, at the time, did not permit of my-coming to his aid personally; so I had to cast our burden on a friend, – a wonderful friend, whose noble, unostentatious generosity I have melancholy pleasure here to make public.

This friend was the late Maharaja of Tippera, Radhakishore Manikya and the deep affection and high regard which he happened to conceive for me, has remained a mysterious marvel throughout my life. At that juncture the wedding of his son was about to be celebrated in right royal style. I seized the opportunity to tell him that I was supplicant for a favour worthy of the occasion. He smiled when I set forth the nature of my request. "I do not know", said he, "nor am I competent to judge of the work of

Jagadish Bose. But to you I can refuse nothing, and I am not concerned to inquire what you will do with my gift", with which he handed me a cheque for Rs. 15,000. That gift I dedicated to pave the way for the triumphal march of my friend, and this I deem a fit occasion for placing the credit where it is due.

Thereafter, as everyone knows, Jagadish carved his own way to universal recognition. His European reputation attracted the attention of a high Government official, whose influence enabled him to extend his researches into the flora of different localities, till at length his growing fame made it practicable for the splendidly equipped Bose Institute to be founded near his home.

Thus was the apparently impossible made possible by sheer-dint of his keen insight, his unwearied perseverance, his indomitable courage. It was, I think, the first time in India that a solitary worker was able to draw from the coffers of the Government, as well as from his own wealthy countrymen, such large contributions to keep on his work. Once Jagadish Chandra overstepped the period of initial stringency, the goddess Lakshmi came forward with abundant favours, and gave up for her usual fickleness.

In the day of his success Jagadish gained an invaluable energiser and helper in Sister Nivedita, and in any record of his life's work her name must be given a place of honour. Thereforward his renown spread all over the world, overcoming every obstacle.

That was for me the time when cruel inclemencies beset my own field of work, as I struggled one, through sunshine and storm, labouring with my embankments of clay that kept melting away one after another. Thus immersed and drifted apart from kith and kin and friends, I was unable to follow the later development of Jagadish-chandra's researches, and so it becomes me not today to attempt to embellish with my feeble testimony the acclamations of the world at large. □