

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the organisers for inviting me to participate at the Symposium on Utopias from Asia in Visva Bharati. However, due to other obligations I can not be present.

Rabindranath Tagore was not only a poet and writer of the highest order; he was a great philosopher, a true internationalist. His ideas and wisdom on religion, utopia or politics, his love for nature, his spiritual and romantic notions and his humanity can be seen and felt in his work, and made his creation so unique.

Rabindranath Tagore was a free and fearless thinker, who did not hesitate to be open about his unconventional ideas, which were visible in certain situations during the Indian freedom movement. Utopianism was reflected to a great extent in his political ideas, his criticism on narrow nationalism. He was the champion of cosmopolitan universalism. Unfortunately his idea of “the entire world is one state” is still an utopia.

His unique experiment on education that has formed Visva Bharati was also based on a partially utopian idea. But today this dream of his, to a great extent, is a reality.

And still today his words hold true: “From now onward, any nation which takes an isolated view of its own country will run counter to the spirit of the new Age, and know no peace. From now onward, the anxiety that each country has for its own safety must embrace the welfare of the world”.

I wish all the participants a very interesting symposium that may lead to new insights.

R. Schmiedchen

The Consul General of the Federal Republic of Germany, Kolkata

The Directorate-General Cultural Heritage Rhineland-Palatinate

Message of Greeting

Honoured participants of the symposium 'Utopias from Asia' in Santiniketan!

On the occasion of the 150th birthday of the great poet and thinker, Rabindranath Tagore, you, distinguished international scholars, have gathered at the Visva Bharati University, in order to discuss utopias from Asia. The political, social and cultural changes that moved and radically changed the world since the productive era of the eminent Nobel laureate, Tagore, dramatically prove that elementary issues of the relation between man and world, between societies, peoples and nations must be raised again and again in order to search after reliable answers for the future. Ours is the chance, in the light of present challenges and responsibility for future generations, to research and make use of the models and utopias, which great thinkers of all times and all cultures have conveyed to us. This is precisely what you have come to Santiniketan for.

People of the 21st century are still moved by questions about our historical heritage, and how this heritage influences our perceptions and actions. They are still moved by questions of reason, direction and objective that have been moving mankind at all times. Present day man still asks the question about the meaning of life, about justice, about a higher principle of order. Even though progress and radical change may seem to replace such questioning in favour of one-sided materialism – a questioning, as it were, after the breath of time –, such existential questions remain, sometimes proving a certain uneasiness with one's own society and culture.

A lot of people have realised that a one-sided material belief in progress, a purely quantitative thinking and acting, will lead the world into a threatening cul-de-sac. There are many who aspire to a qualitative development, combining man, nature and culture in unity.

Rabindranath Tagore, a visionary, pursued both poles: *conservation and progress*, following the time-honoured wisdom of India as well as the insights of modernity. A poet of the Bengali language, he always thought and acted in an international way. And he travelled extensively all over the world; he integrated western thinking and western culture in his voluminous opus; he inspired, impregnated and presented the west with his work. Rabindranath Tagore's utopias consisted not only of realisations he laid down in writing; his enlightened mind was always concrete. He was not only a great poet and thinker, but also a great pragmatist. Santiniketan and the Visva Bharati University are examples for his way of dealing with utopias. His oeuvre is still fresh to the present day, still up-to-date, full of vitality, spirituality, beauty and far-sightedness. He left us a great legacy, a precious gift, which was to mould our thinking and acting:

Candour and joy, not confinement or, worse, hate; enjoyment of one's own existence, and of others' existence; the joy of responsibility, which everybody can accept for himself as well as for the whole; enjoyment of one's own culture, and openness regarding the complexity of all life-schemes, philosophies, cultures, religions, and, yes, utopias: this is Tagore's legacy.

The Directorate-General Cultural Heritage Rhineland-Palatinate bears the responsibility for the state of Rhineland-Palatinate for an important part of our historical and cultural sources. The Directorate-General is responsible for archaeology and preservation of monuments, for the state's important castles, and for three big

museums in the cities of Mayence (Mainz), Treves (Trier), and Koblenz. In our opinion the researching, conserving, and mediating of our past is the chance for a better interpretation of the presence, in order to learn for the future. And we perceive the encounter with the cultures of the world as fruitful.

In historical times, Rhineland-Palatinate was the heart of Europe. Four world cultural heritage sites have been accredited in Rhineland-Palatinate by the UNESCO, one of them the world-famous romantic Middle Rhine Valley including the Loreley cliff. Following the invitation of young people from just that region who visited Santiniketan in the 1920s, Rabindranath Tagore travelled around our homeland and the Rhine. He retained his impressions in a lively conversation with Albert Einstein. It was in this conversation that he mentioned the city of Koblenz and its youth hostel. The youth hostel is located in the fort Ehrenbreitstein today, formerly a huge military fortification; since a fairly long time, however, it became a lively cultural centre and the important domicile of the Directorate-General Cultural Heritage Rhineland-Palatinate. Beneath Ehrenbreitstein Clemens Brentano lived and wrote his poetry. Goethe visited Koblenz, and so did, as a matter of fact, the Goethe of India: Rabindranath Tagore.

We are therefore extremely delighted that the Institute of Indology of the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, led by Professor Konrad Meisig, is partner of this symposium, thus enabling us and the state of Rhineland-Palatinate to be part of this important international symposium. We are equally delighted that Dr Martin Kämpchen, a son of our state and the romantic Middle Rhine Valley, who studied in Santiniketan where he has lived and worked for many years, is a participant of this symposium. Being a writer, editor and translator, Dr Kämpchen constitutes an important bridge to disclose Rabindranath Tagore's work for us and bring Bengal and her people even nearer to our hearts.

We hope that the symposium will have a broad impact so that a fruitful exchange will grow of it in the spirit of Rabindranath Tagore.

Mayence (Mainz), October 2011

The Directorate-General Cultural Heritage Rhineland-Palatinate

Thomas Metz
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Message of Greeting

Utopias from Asia, Symposium in Santiniketan, 16-17 November 2011

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Helmut Schmidt said in 1980: "Whoever has visions should turn to a doctor." With utopias, it is rather different. Those who cannot imagine that the society and world we all live in could be altered and might even be better will do nothing to make such a change happen, hence seem to be blind and lame. After Second World War, most Europeans benefited from the economic pursuit of more and more profits but now the criticism is getting louder as profit maximisation efforts have made themselves independent.

Currently, it has become apparent that many people in many countries from North African States over the United States and many European countries have started to stand up for a better world. Even in Frankfurt young people have "occupied the financial district" to protest against injustices.

Trade in itself cannot be evil as it makes two parties to communicate with each other to come to an agreement and engage in exchange. For some years already the German-Indian Round Table is engaged in improving economic relations between India and Germany. The GIRT welcomes the fact that there are also forces that promote cultural exchange for a balance of forces is what we need.

To look into the timeless thoughts and works of Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore is worthwhile in any case and we wish this upcoming symposium to be a likewise successful exchange of modern thinking. We believe that it is high time to open our Western ears and hearts for utopias from Asia.

Andrea Kaiser, German Indian Round Table (GIRT), Frankfurt