

Opening Remarks of Shri Suresh K. Goel, Director General, ICCR
at the inaugural session of the International Conference
“Tagore’s Vision of the Contemporary World”
on 10th October, 2011

It is my proud privilege to welcome Shri Pranab Mukherjee, the Hon’ble Minister of Finance who is our Chief Guest at the inauguration of this International Conference on **“Tagore’s Vision of the Contemporary World”**. I have known him practically the entire duration of my career in Foreign Service. I recall the depth of his intellect and a natural instinct in dealing with international issues when he was the Minister of External Affairs on various occasions. I was a junior officer in the Ministry then dealing with the post-1991 East European countries. I also extend a very warm welcome to President of ICCR, Dr. Karan Singh, a philosopher and statesman whose visionary approach to the Indian civilization and philosophy spanning Vedic thought to the composite Ganga–Jamani Tehjeeb of contemporary India has given ICCR a new life. I have learnt a lot from him during my last one year as Director General, ICCR and I hope that I will continue to be guided by his wisdom in future. I would also like to welcome Prof. Amiya K. Bagchi, a distinguished scholar of human development studies who is giving the keynote address today. My heartiest welcome to all distinguished and learned scholars, writers and all our guests who are present here.

The commemoration of 150th Birth Anniversary of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore started on 7th May, 2011 with the joint celebrations in Dhaka and New Delhi. The National Implementation Committee has approved an extensive and comprehensive schedule of activities and institutional measures to ensure that this great scholar, educator and philosopher and the Son of India is remembered internationally in a defining manner. ICCR was chosen as the organization to coordinate international activities in commemoration plan, mainly through our Missions and Cultural Centres abroad but also through international events in India on a selective basis. This International Conference is a part of this responsibility of ICCR.

In conjunction with the International Conference, an exhibition of photographs on Shantiniketan by the well-known French scholar and photographer, Alain Danielou and Raymond Burnier is being held in the adjoining Art Gallery of ICCR. The photographs capture the intrinsic beauty and tranquility of Shantiniketan. We are also doing the Indian launch of the well-known book “Rabindranath Tagore: A Timeless Mind” which has been published by The Tagore Centre of London in collaboration with ICCR. Contributions in the book have come from those who speak Bengali as well as others who do not read or speak Bengali but have picked up a little Bengali in their journey through Tagore’s world. In that sense, the book represents a truly international view of Tagore, taking him out of the purely Bengali, Indian or English context.

We need to remind ourselves that Tagore did not live in compartments with divided boundaries. His thoughts and his actions went beyond parochial lines whether they belonged to the movement for nationalism or to pursuit of creative endeavors. Primarily a poet, he was also a painter; he was an educator, Shantiniketan remains his greatest gift to Indian education; he was a reformer, his contributions to liberation of women remain unparalleled; he acted in films and

wrote for films; he also endorsed products to support the swadeshi or the nationalist agenda. Most of all, he was the philosopher who lived beyond the narrow confines of his times. His vision continues to inspire us today. Tagore's dream of a world order **“not broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls”** must become a reality in today's world, which is making a desperate attempt to liberate itself from the **“conflict of civilizations”**.

ICCR's programme has focused on this aspect of Tagore's vision. Our programmes to be taken abroad include not just choreographies of his well-known dance dramas and Rabindra Sangeet. We have attempted to portray Tagore as an intrepid traveller and the first and the best-known Ambassador of India even before our independence, through various exhibitions on his travels abroad. We have attempted to produce a multimedia choreography focusing on his contributions to the women's liberation through portrayal of the women who influenced his life and literature. We have also shown Tagore as the man who did very unusual things such as advertisements and films. We have organized conferences abroad to examine Tagore's vision and create a global icon in Tagore.

The essential approach of the ICCR has been to take Tagore out of narrow national context and project a true international humanist that he was.

Once again a very warm welcome to all participants in the seminar and our heartfelt thanks to Hon'ble Minister of Finance, the Hon'ble President of ICCR and Prof. Amiya K Bagchi for their presence on this occasion. And, in the end, I must not forget to thank Prof. Indra Nath Choudhuri who has so ably coordinated this entire seminar for ICCR.