

Tenth Convocation held on November 28, 1975

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Mr. Chancellor, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, distinguished guests, graduates of the year, ladies and gentlemen:

I am extremely grateful to the University of North Bengal for having done me the honour of inviting me to be the Chief Guest and address the Convocation today. When I received the invitation from your Vice-Chancellor, full of warmth and affection, I immediately bowed to his behest for reasons more than one, the most important being my curiosity to see your University about which I had heard quite a lot. Situated as it is on a picturesque spot in the laps of the Himalayas, it has always been endowed with bountiful blessings of nature. In spite of being still in its teens, it has made tremendous progress. Besides being a multiple-faculty University, it has recently added a medical college and a law college; it is heartening to learn that the first batch of the Medical graduates will be receiving their degrees today. It has thus made excellent progress in its rather brief life-time of 13-14 years. Its departments of postgraduates studies have already established a reputation for scholarship and research. I understand that the University aspires to add research centres in Social Sciences and Life Sciences and also proposes to establish some more Post Graduate Departments including Nepali and Anthropology. This will certainly add another feather to the University's cap.

With 27,000 students on its rolls and 33 colleges under its control, it is a befitting recognition of its rapid progress that the University has already attracted students from all over the state and beyond its boundaries. In view of its all round rapid progress, I am sure that very soon the University will grow into a centre of greater excellence.

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Dear young graduates, your hearts are filled with a natural sense of pride at your great achievement through your hard work and perseverance. It is my very pleasant duty to extend to you my heartiest felicitations, wishing you a prosperous and fruitful life in service of the nation. May you by your conduct and achievements throughout your lives bring honour to your almatater in the years to come.

The main idea behind a Convocation is to have exchange of ideas about the development of higher education and to offer a word of advice to the fresh graduates. In this highly competitive and fastly changing world of today when knowledge itself is growing at a fantastic phenomenal pace, my foremost advice to you would be the although the University has certified that you are now bachelors or masters of your subject, yet in spite of the feeling of pride, it should give you also an understanding that even the best of you have received merely an inkling of the vast storehouse of knowledge in your respective disciplines, and what your learned and conscientious teachers have been able to provide you with is merely a key to enable you to open the vast vistas and portals of knowledge. In spite of a rapid expansion in higher education, you certainly belong to a very small percentage of privileged young persons in your age group who have been fortunate enough to receive the benefits of higher education in the country, where majority of the population is living even now below the poverty line. In order to repay this debt to the society, you have to go out in life with the ambition of service and in order to be able to render useful and enlightened service to the society, you must develop your mental faculties throughout your lives and continuously knock at the doors of knowledge and replenish it by glimpses which you can hope to get only after constant endeavour and effort.

We often hear of all sorts of criticism some of which may be even justified about the purpose and achievements of higher education in the country since independence. Most of this criticism generally centres around deterioration in standards and quality of the whole educational

apparatus, which continues to follow a rigid and inflexible system and has not adapted itself to the ever-changing needs and growing aspirations of the society. Being one who has been involved in this process intimately in all its phases during the last three decades, I would like to emphasise that in spite of the vast expansion and meagre resources which have not at all kept pace with increasing numbers and escalating prices, the quality and standards of education have improved considerably in all the spheres of the educational system. The critics are quite justified in their conclusion when they compare the quality that has been achieved in our country with the progress made during the same period in many other developed countries. Certainly, there is no denying the fact that gap has been unfortunately widening. Although much more could have been achieved by greater enthusiasm of teachers and students and by better organization of efforts, the need to regulate admissions at the tertiary stage of education and providing higher inputs for teaching and research at this stage also are prerequisites before the society can expect standards comparable to the international level. The new "10+2+3" pattern of education must not only make provision for vocationalisation of courses and channelising a large fraction of young people into vocations rather than merely to use colleges as waiting houses but also lead to the regulation of numbers in our Colleges and Universities. Once this is achieved, it could be the beginning of a new era of higher education to meet the ends of the society.

Regarding the problem of flexibility and adaptation of courses best suited to the needs and aspirations of the society, nobody can deny that in spite of some changes which have recently taken place, the course contents and methods of education continue to remain basically unchanged on the inherited pattern of colonial days. As I continue to be a teacher and have the best regard for this community, I hope I would not be misunderstood when I say that it is a very sad commentary on us that in spite of the passage of almost three decades we have not made sufficient progress in getting our educational process free from undue

western influence. Our metaphors in languages, description of topics like regional resources of materials and minerals and research problems, even in several important fields such as economies, appear to be centred to an unjustifiable extent around the foreign scene. In fact, we appear to be more eager to add to dot an 'i' or cross a 't' (I wish we were more capable at least in these directions) and thus at our best, contribute marginally to the efforts being made by our counterparts in developed countries in solving problems of their region.

Having accepted this drawback of our own efforts, I would certainly like to assert that expectations sometimes made from the Universities and its colleges to train graduates for vocations in life are to be looked at with caution. The primary role of the Universities and colleges (leaving professional institutions) should continue to be to develop the mind and make it capable of inviting new challenges as they continue to arise in the fast changing world of today. Mere mechanical training that is suited to a profession at a particular point of graduation would be, to some extent, denying the very purpose of higher education.

We have fortunately been experiencing a period of lull and quiet in the Universities during the current session, but this should not lead us to a sense of complacency. It is an excellent opportunity for us to ponder over our deficiencies and shortcomings of our system. We should take advantage of this peaceful atmosphere to set our own house in order, and find reasons which have led to a widespread discontentment and dissatisfaction amongst the youth in recent years.

Not only in this country but in fact throughout the world, the University system is passing through a period of acute strain and stress and a deep analysis of the relevant factors is essential before the system would be able to retain its prestige and also serve the community in an effective manner. In spite of the regional differences, some problems of the Universities and Institutions of higher learning are surprisingly

similar. For example, the following words of James A. Perkin appear to be as relevant to our situation as they are to a developed nation like that of the United States:

“The predicament of University organization has arisen in part, because of its conflicting missions. The University is asked not only to perform conflicting missions but also to perform them within the framework of an organizational design appropriate to its earliest mission—that of teaching or the transmission of knowledge. The newer functions of research, public service, and most recently, the achievement of an ideal democratic community within the University have organizational requirements that are significantly different from those necessary for teaching.”

In fact, although a developing society like ours does expect and some times, rightly so, that the Universities should play their due role in the development of not only new knowledge but also new technology which might enrich the society in order to enable them to bear the ever-increasing burden of modern teaching and research. The society has, in its turn, to plan and channelize its resources in a much more meaningful way so that the initial inputs for research efforts are provided and the Universities are able to play their due role in development efforts.

Another problem which has been referred to above is that of democratization. There is no doubt that we have been tied down to a hierarchical system in our Universities rather too tightly and too strongly. Having accepted a democratic pattern of life, it is but natural that similar aspirations would be aroused and would be demanded in the educational institutions. I am sure all of us are enthusiastic in this direction but the only point to be noted is that we do not get drifted in this process too fast and too far so that academic excellence gets diluted to a level of common mediocrity whereas the lowest levels are not raised to the same extent.

In conclusion, may I once again address myself to the fresh

graduates of this young University and other students and teachers. You are in a much more advantageous position that you are not yet bound to the shackles of traditions at least in your own growing institution as your counterparts in the older institutions often are. It is much easier for a young institution to make novel innovations and adopt a new system at the very initial stages so as to serve the society in the best manner possible and for these efforts, I can offer no advice better than the words of the Father of our Nation:

“I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. I refuse to live in other peoples houses as an interloper, a beggar or a slave”.

With these words, I again congratulate the graduates, who I am sure will bring happiness to themselves and prosperity to the community, by their sense of service and dedication to society.

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