

# UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL



## ELEVENTH ANNUAL CONVOCATION

Address by  
Professor AMLAN DATTA  
Vice-Chancellor

**RAJA RAMMOHUNPUR**

**The 17th September, 1976**

Mr. Chancellor, Professor Bhattacharyya, members of the University, students, other members of the academic fraternity and respected guests, allow me to welcome you most cordially to the Eleventh Annual Convocation of the University of North Bengal. It gives me great pleasure to meet this assembly of friends and well-wishers and to share with you a few thoughts about our University, our strivings and aspirations and some of our problems.

The Annual Convocation is a time for stock-taking. We have not stood still since we met last. We have taken a few forward steps. We have demonstrated to ourselves and to others our capacity for overcoming difficulties. But every forward step is apt to create new problems. The Annual Convocation is a time for taking stock of what we have achieved in the recent past and the problems we will have to face in the near future. Let me mention a few positive things before I begin to tell you about some of our problems.

We have taken the unusual step of distributing at this Convocation diplomas for two successive years. Our B. A. and B. Sc. graduates have received today the diplomas for the years 1974 and 1975. This shows that we have at last made up for lost time. The normal schedule for graduate examinations has been restored. This prepares a base for normalisation of time schedules for admission to post-graduate classes.

At the same time, we have introduced far-reaching reforms in the system of examination itself. For some time past, the University Grants Commission has been pleading for the semester system and continuous assessment of student performance. We have introduced the new system for all post-graduate departments. This puts us in a special position in West Bengal, where some Universities have adopted the new system in some departments, but no University except ours has got it for all post-graduate departments.

The semester system along with continuous evaluation means that students have to work hard from the beginning of the session. They work more and learn more; and they are tested continuously for what they learn, so that their final results are not determined by the accident of their performance at one or two big examinations, but by the sum total of their showings over a series of appearances, which presumably yields a more dependable account of their real worth. I do not know if this is the best system for the best student; but it is, I believe, a better system for the average student, and, therefore, for the majority of students, provided the teacher, who is also the examiner under a system of continuous evaluation, has the will and the freedom to act conscientiously. We have made a move in the right direction and I trust that our students and teachers will proudly protect what we have thus achieved, while continuing the effort further to improve upon it.

In our undergraduate colleges we have introduced the new system in a limited way and with due caution. Twenty per cent of the total marks will depend on continuous internal evaluation while eighty per cent will depend on public examinations. The University will exercise powers of inspection and supervision in relation to internal tests conducted by the colleges themselves and undertake sample scrutiny to satisfy itself that proper standards are being maintained by all concerned. A college which unduly lowers the standards of internal tests will do so at the risk of being branded and penalised by the University.

The new system will require closer attention to students on the part of teachers and more tutorial classes. The average student in our University needs more drilling, and this is what the system of continuous evaluation intends to provide. However, we can only move forward gradually, which is the main reason why we have introduced the new system in our undergraduate colleges in a very limited way. Some of our colleges are evidently understaffed. They need more resources. I take this opportunity to appeal to the government to consider the problem carefully. In the field of higher education, the present policy is to consolidate the position of existing institutions rather than to multiply their number. In North Bengal there is certainly much to be done by way of consolidating and improving upon the present position.

I have already started talking about problems. This exist not only in our many affiliated colleges, but on the main campus itself. There is one problem in particular which stares us in the face right now and I should lose no time in mentioning it. The University Grants Commission, in its report for the Fifth Plan period submitted early this year, sanctioned quite a few additional teaching posts for our University. We, on our part, have already started filling up those posts. But in the process we find ourselves pitted against a formidable difficulty. We have new posts; but we do not have additional residential quarters, nor money to construct more houses. Many of our new recruits will be forced to stay outside the campus. The nearest town is at a distance of several miles from the University and there is housing shortage at Siliguri and rents are high.

I wish to stress the gravity of this problem. Even as it is, it is not easy to attract the best scholars to North Bengal University because people tend to drift in the direction of Calcutta. We cannot overcome this problem except by making the campus a little more attractive and hospitable to those who come to stay here. If we fail to provide quarters to our new teachers, and if at the same time, we continue to be restrained by the existing rules from paying House Rent Allowance to those teachers who are forced to live in rented houses outside the campus, we shall indeed be imposing on them a hardship which they do not deserve. There is also want of accommodation for our research scholars. I draw the attention of the government to this

serious problem; it poses a threat to the growth and stability of our University and it needs to be tackled promptly.

Despite such obstacles, North Bengal University continues to expand and improve. Two new departments have been added to the University very recently. No other University in India has a post-graduate Department of Nepali. This, to be sure, makes our task rather difficult. It will take a little time before the new department can start functioning properly and, meanwhile, we will need the sympathy and good wishes of all concerned.

A new Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology has already been established. We have secured the services of an able anthropologist as Professor and Head of the Department. I consider this to be an important development. North Bengal offers extraordinarily rich possibilities of sociological and anthropological study and research. The absence of facilities for such study was a serious gap in our academic life. With proper leadership the new department may hopefully develop into a centre of research which will lend distinction to this University.

We have received the approval of the University Grants Commission to start a Centre for Life Science Studies. The University Grants Commission has also been approached for permission to establish here a Centre for Himalayan Studies. These centres should provide a basis for vigorous research activities. Nor will these be simply a replica of similar activities going on at other centres of learning, but we intend to focus our attention chiefly on the special features of the physical environment, history and social organisation of those segments of humanity which belong to this region. A few modest research projects, involving inter-disciplinary cooperation, have already been adopted. But this is only a beginning and we look forward to a future big with promise.

Some notable pioneers notwithstanding, we can not boast a firmly established tradition of social science research in North Bengal. In some respects, we have to start from scratch. We have to train up a band of research workers. During the last summer vacation we organised a training course on the methodology of social science research. The response was encouraging. It is now a question of sustaining the enthusiasm, of tenacity in a good cause, of building up a body of skills and a corporate life striving continuously to justify itself by what it contributes to the world of scholarship. Whatever we invest here by way of money, labour and devotion can only mature slowly and yield its fruits after a fair interval and, in the mean time, we have to keep hope high and faith alive.

Like symbols of those sprouting hopes, we have, during the last few months, planted the campus all over with a large number of saplings of carefully selected varieties. These too will take time to grow. There are certain things which yield but passing pleasure, and others which grow slowly and add a more lasting beauty and significance to life. It is by this capacity to

value lasting things that an institution is sustained, though individuals may come and go. I am happy to take this opportunity to acknowledge with gratitude the guidance and encouragement we have constantly received from the Chancellor and the financial assistance generously granted by the Government of West Bengal for the beautification and development of our campus.

Before I conclude, I must make a special reference to our Medical College where the problems are, in some ways, very formidable. Some have thought fit to judge us harshly on our performance there. But if there is one thing that is more impressive than what our Medical College lacks as yet, it is what it has succeeded in building up already. There is at least no want of earnest effort and things are coming up fast. I daresay that we have an excellent team of teachers and workers in our Medical College, whose devoted labours deserve greater appreciation than it has received so far. We have produced our second batch of Medical graduates. Observers, competent and impartial, have remarked that these graduates were taught very well indeed and that the examinations were unquestionably as fair as one could wish them to be. These students have every right to receive from society full recognition of their worth. I hope that justice will not be denied them nor delayed any further.

Ladies and gentlemen, the University of North Bengal is moving forward. A larger number of doctoral dissertations, for instance, were completed during the last one year than at any time before. I think we are entitled to look forward with modest optimism. Equally we look back with gratitude to those who stood by us in the past. We have decided to set up a park next to the main entrance to the University and name it after our first Chancellor. We have also decided to give the name of Bidhan Bhavan to the new administrative building which is coming up, in grateful remembrance of Bidhan Chandra Roy to whose vision this University owes its existence. But names alone do not mean much. We have to justify ourselves by our work. Let us wish our new graduates the best of luck. Let us hope and trust that North Bengal University will be in future what it has always been in the dreams of its well-wishers, a frontier University with growing opportunities for dedicated men and women to fulfil themselves through it and give of their best to society.