

# UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

## TWELFTH ANNUAL CONVOCATION



Address

by

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*Vice-Chancellor*

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Mr. Chancellor, Dr. Mukherjee, Members of the University Council, respected Guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is my privilege and honour to be able to welcome you all to the twelfth Annual Convocation of this University. Let me at the outset congratulate the young graduates and other awardees of degrees and distinctions for whom the Convocation ceremony is primarily meant. I am sure you would all like to join me in congratulating them.

It is customary for the Vice-Chancellor to present on this occasion a report on the progress and achievements of the University in the recent past, to indicate the problems which need to be overcome and prospects of future development. I would like to do so very briefly.

For some years now this University has been looking for opportunities to develop specialised departments and centres of study and research for which there are distinct potentialities in North Bengal and its adjoining regions. The Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology was established in 1976 in view of the felt need for social and anthropological studies in this frontier region. A Centre for Life Science Studies was set up last year in the same context. The faculty of this centre have under consideration several research projects, some of those in collaboration with the Departments of Bio-Chemistry and Physiology of the University Medical College. The U. G. C. and the Govt. of West Bengal have also approved the establishment of a Centre for Himalayan Studies which is likely to be set up very soon. The opportunities of regional studies and research with inter-disciplinary co-operation in the fields of sociology, anthropology, bio-sciences, geo-politics, economics, history as well as linguistics may thus be said to have become real challenges to our academics, intellectuals and scientists. I am confident that we shall not be found unresponsive. I hope that the post-graduate department of Nepali language and literature which started functioning in 1976, with the Nepali Academy now

shifted to the Campus, will also engage in studies bearing on the life and culture of the Nepali speaking inhabitants of the hill areas, and play its due role in inter-disciplinary research.

It is needless to mention that the Centres of regional studies and research of this University will in due course provide a strong empirical basis for the socio-economic development of this region. A matter of immediate relevance in this context is worth noting here. Tea plantations and tea processing not only earn valuable foreign exchange for the national exchequer but are also the main sources of livelihood for a large section of the people in the surrounding areas. A proposal to establish an Institute of Tea Science and Management was mooted in 1974 but could not be pursued earlier for various reasons. The scheme which envisages research and training has been recently submitted to the U. G. C. for approval and assistance. We hope to get necessary assistance from the Govt. of West Bengal as well. Various organisations of tea industry and trade and individual industrialists and merchants have also expressed their willingness to help.

While emphasising the prospects of socially purposive studies and research which are going to be pursued in this University, I must touch upon the development of our post graduate departments. With the unstinted devotion of the teaching faculty, science departments have built up commendable research facilities and these are being improved now through financial assistance from the U. G. C. and the State Government. Partly in recognition of the high quality of research being done in the Science departments, the U. G. C. has just given approval for a University Service and Instrumentation Centre (U.S.I.C.), the first of its kind to be set up in West Bengal. We have also got the approval of the U. G. C. for setting up a Research Service Centre at this University to provide computational and related facilities to the teachers and researchers of different departments. The Research

Service Centre should in course of time install a modern EDP system. We hope to set up both these centres in the near future. Although research activities in the arts and humanities departments are being pursued, there are certain handicaps which have stood in the way of more vigorous work. Faculty positions and professorships remain to be filled up in several departments. Once the positions are filled up and with the opening up of new opportunities of inter-disciplinary studies, I hope the humanities departments will contribute more substantially to research in the near future.

I have so far dealt with the opportunities of research which we can avail of. However, the University has another vital responsibility, that of continuously improving the standard of education. One of the pre-conditions of effective education is the existence of a system of continuous evaluation of the students' progress as much as the course contents and methods of instruction. A scheme of periodical internal assessment under semester system was introduced recently both at the under-graduate and post-graduate levels. It has been so to speak the harbinger of a new type of academic effort on the part of students and teachers. But it is too early to lay any claim to perfection. With the existing limitation of resources as well as the continuation of earlier perceptions and attitudes, the new system has suffered from various difficulties, stresses and strains. Despite these, there is a general awareness of its usefulness. We shall therefore undertake periodical review of the system of internal assessment and try to improve its operation in the light of our experience. Along with this process, it will have to be ensured that examinations are held and results are announced on schedule. We have in this University a better record established in this respect in recent years. The accumulated backlogs of the first degree examinations have already been cleared, and by May this year we shall also be able to clear arrear examinations of post-graduate students. With the efforts that are afoot, and given the

co-operation of teachers, administrative staff and non-teaching personnel, it should be possible for us to publish results in time.

As regards the improvement of college education, I would like to mention the steps which have been taken about the introduction of new syllabi from July 1978 following the 10+2 stage of school education. The under-graduate syllabi which have been drafted by the Boards of Studies of this University are in accordance with the pattern of 2-year pass and 3-year Honours courses with the provision of one year special Honours course after the two-year pass course in Arts. Since February this year, we have organised a series of seminars at selected regional centres in which teachers from nearby colleges and teachers from post-graduate departments have come together to discuss the new syllabi in different subjects. These seminars in the first series are intended to enable teachers to prepare for the new courses to be offered. The scheme of regional seminars have been by and large successful with the enthusiastic co-operation of large sections of teachers. Such seminars can be organised in successive series with the following objects : (i) providing opportunities to teachers to exchange ideas on academic matters of common interest, (ii) self-assessment of teachers through exposure to new ideas and expanding frontiers of knowledge, (iii) sharing ideas on potential research, (iv) reviewing the teaching methods and contents of the existing syllabi. The success of all these efforts would however depend upon the provision of minimum facilities and creation of necessary conditions in the colleges. Some of our colleges do not have the requisite number of teachers and ministerial staff, while library grants are meagre. The Govt. of West Bengal has recently taken over the responsibility of meeting the salary of teaching and non-teaching staff of private colleges. This is a laudable step. But along with it there is also scope for a proper assessment of the needs for additional staff in colleges. The necessity of

additional grants for improving library and book bank facilities ought to be examined in the same context.

No University today can ignore its responsibility towards the community from which it draws sustenance. Students and teachers of the University and colleges are a privileged minority. We have had the good fortune of receiving higher education. The vast majority of people suffer from abject poverty as well as illiteracy and ignorance. The districts of North Bengal and adjoining territories are no exception. We are duty bound to do something about the problems. It should be possible for us to start a continuing programme of adult education and literacy whereby the people around us can be gradually lifted from the existing state of ignorance.

Another task which we propose to undertake is to help young graduates avail of the opportunities of self-employment which abound in these parts of the country. The new courses of studies which will be introduced in the colleges in July 1978 can be taken as the basis for designing short (6 months or one year) employment-oriented courses which will enable graduates to take up technical jobs as well as start small works on their own. Preliminary steps are being taken to formulate such short courses.

Having reported on our academic efforts and potentialities, I would like to mention a few things about the University Campus. Construction of several new buildings were taken up during the last few years. The ground floor of the administrative building has just been completed and the construction of the first floor is to begin in a couple of months. Several residential flats for teachers are also under construction. Regarding space for academic and research centres, construction work of the building for the Centre of Life Science Studies and an auditorium, for which sanction of necessary financial grant is

shortly expected, will be started during the next few months. A hostel for research scholars and additional quarters for the Class IV staff of the University have to be constructed in the near future for which the U. G. C. has been approached for financial assistance. Development of the University Campus by way of adequate roads, greeneries, parks and playgrounds have been undertaken from time to time in the past with special grants received for that purpose. We need more funds to give an aesthetic look to our Camps which extends over 330 acres of land.

Certain other aspects of Campus development ought to be mentioned before I close. The University gets its power supply from the State Electricity Board. But for various reasons the supply has continued to be rather erratic resulting in serious dislocation of academic activities, uncertainty of water supply and other difficulties in the daily life of Campus dwellers. To ensure regularity of power supply for more essential requirements of the Campus, a generator set of 88 KW was procured by the University. It needs to be commissioned by installing a transformer and necessary transmission lines. The existing water supply system through deep tubewells was started in 1962-63 when the population of the Campus was less than one-third of what it is to-day. A new deep tubewell was sunk but water supply could not be regularised for want of another water storage tank. Work will very soon start for the construction of a R.C. overhead tank of 25000 gallons capacity. The extensive boundary of the Campus is not properly walled and in view of the problem of security of the Campus dwellers, as well as unauthorised encroachment of University land, construction of boundary walls in the more vulnerable parts around the Campus has to be taken up on priority. We are thankful to the Government of West Bengal for a special sanction of Rs. 5.50 lakhs for the above three purposes.

I would like to end now with a personal note. I took charge as Vice-Chancellor of this University about five months back. The

achievements and progress which I have narrated above have been possible due to the co-operative effort of all members of the University community before and after I took charge. If my report sounds optimistic it is because I have been encouraged to adopt such a note from my experience during the last five months. God willing, we shall continue to be guided by a spirit of optimism in future.

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