

Sixteenth Convocation held on April 6, 1982

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Distinguished Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Members of the Faculty Graduates of the year, ladies and Gentlemen,

May I take this opportunity of expressing my heartfelt gratitude to the Chancellor, Vice Chancellor and Faculty Members for inviting me to deliver the convocation address of this highly esteemed university of North Bengal. This is an auspicious occasion for the university, in general, and graduates and postgraduates students, in particular, who will be obtaining their degrees today and would be entering in a new arena of life and work. While awarding them degrees the first thing which strikes me most is about their career prospects, especially at a time when we are confronted with the threatening problem of unemployment and the university degrees do not hold any promise to serve as a passport to job. Nor does the present system of education provide them an adventurous spirit, a self-confidence, faith in one's own resources and the functional capability to start a small scale industry or some business enterprise. Most of our students who have been accommodated in the university system do not have any purpose in life and they are primarily staying in the system because they do not have anything else to do except to find some suitable job in the government or non-governmental agencies. Whenever I visit an institution of higher education, I generally get upset on looking at the grim and gloomy faces of young students because of the poor job opportunities in our developing society. This is understandable because their main motive for obtaining university education is to get some secure and pensionable job preferably in the public sector.

It is rather sad that we have not cared to understand the implications of the university education in terms of man making, nation-building

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and world making as enunciated by Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru gave a giggly perceptive and incisive definition of the Allahabad in 1947. He said, "A university stands for humanism, for tolerance, for reason, for the adventure of ideas and for the search of truth. It stands for the onward march of the human race towards even higher objectives. If the universities discharge their duties adequately 'then it is well with the nation and people'", Rabindranath Tagore in his memorable poem has viewed the university education in terms of the actualization of maximum human potentials, the emancipation of mind from various fears and the preparation of individual for his voyage to self-discovery, He writes:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

Where Knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic

walls;

Where words come out from the depth of truth;

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into tied reary desert sand of dead habit;

Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever widening thought and action—

Into that heaven of Freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

Why we have not been able to operationalize the educational ideas of our thinkers and seers in the educational system during the post-independence period is a serious question which we have to address ourselves today to find out a sound and reasonable answer. Granted that there may not be a simplified prescription to this complex problem, we should not abandon our quest for a new educational alternative.

Perhaps this is the right place for posing this issue and we might succeed in locating an appropriate educational alternative along with the operational strategies for overcoming the present-day educational stalemate. I deliberately used the word "right place" because whenever I look at the contributions of the Bengal State towards the awakening of the political consciousness among the Indian people, providing them a rich cultural ideology and new energy and a driving force for fighting a relentless battle against the colonial rulers during the pre-independent days, I am overwhelmed with the mixed feelings of joy and agony. Joy because at such a critical juncture of the Indian history, the State of Bengal could produce distinguished multidimensional personalities like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Sri Aurobindo, C. R. Dass, Ashutosh Mookerji, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore and Subash Chandra Bose who not only furnished us an ideological framework for the emancipation, of the country from foreign domination but they were themselves relentless fighters and revolutionaries and nothing was more dear to them than the freedom of the country. One is deeply moved by the literature produced by these distinguished luminaries of Bengal like Rabindranath Tagore, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda which explicitly or implicitly contributed to the cultural renaissance in the country. While the people of other parts of the country were living in complacency and accepting passively the colonial rule, Bengal was struggling for national identity and cultural autonomy. In fact, the national objective and goals were furnished by the revolutionaries of Bengal to the leaders of other parts of the country.

What depresses me most is why we could not carry forward and appropriately integrate the idealistic ideology, a sense of belonging to the nation, a cultural momentum, an adventurous spirit and an invincible faith in the humanistic values furnished to us by our national elites in our planned developmental programmes for the reconstruction of the country during the post-independence period. Indeed, the entire freedom movement was built on the rich Indian cultural ethos. A set of cultural values that could hold population together were meaningfully employed

to harness the energies of masses towards the social and political reforms and cultural revitalization. These values became sufficient cause for the growth of our national ideology and modernization of our socio-economic structure. The pre-independence political elites drew the symbols from the pragmatism of the Vedas, the logical metaphysics of Upanishads and the karma yoga or the philosophy of positive action as contained in the Gita'. Their idealism was deeply rooted in ethical principles and nonacquisitive forces. For example, Gandhiji always insisted on containing the multiplication of wants of the individual and austerity in our style of living. The current ecological crisis should make humanity pause and think to rediscover the significance of Gandhian ideas to contain the ecological imbalance.

The point which I'm trying to make is that why we could not incorporate our rich cultural ideology in our socio-economic development programmes. The process of modernization demands, spontaneous upsurge of values and motives for laying the firm fountain of economic development. In the absence of clearly defined and coherent cultural goals, it is difficult to achieve a balanced and continuous economic growth. The healthy and positive relationship must be willed and worked out. There are enough evidences to substantiate our point of view that in all modern societies and cultural values were the natural concomitants in the process of their industrialization. According to Max Weber, Protestantism was the major cultural influence during the formative phase of industrialization. In Russian, it was Bolshevism which served as the fountain head for carrying out the industrial revolution. The Puritans of England and the Samurai of Japan also exploited both the instinct of non-acquisitiveness and rich moral propensities for economic breakthrough calls for a new deal i emotions: a definite cultural ideology, commitment to work to work ethic and high moral and intellectual standards. It calls for a decisive shift of resources and power from the parasites to the productive classes. Why could not we employ our rich cultural tradition : this worldly authority and ethical impulses to achieve a balanced growth of economy and a rich qualitative life?

Partly the reason of this failure can be located in the role and structure of the elite of our society. This is not the place to identify the characteristics and qualities of modern elites and compare them with the national elites of pre-independence days, but the point which I intend to make is that modern intellectual and bureaucratic elites have no moorings in the Indian cultural ethos, have acquired contempt for manual and technical type of work and Consequently, they suffer from deep-rooted sense of status anxiety. This loss is serious and is affecting deeply the healthy growth of our polity, society and economy. Unless we are able to recover in our life-styles a sense of belonging to the national ethos, commitment to work ethic, an invincible faith in cultural and unhumanistic values, a scientific temper, a deep interest in the welfare and love for the down-trodden, I'm afraid we would not succeed in achieving the national goal of an egalitarian social order in the near future.

Perhaps the time has come when we must do ruthless introspection into our planned developmental priorities to find out our major weakness in the planning process. The planning was introduced in our country in the early fifties with highly laudable objective that it would generate a co-ordinated growth in various developmental sectors and facilitate the process of equalization of opportunities by modifying the structural and social constrains in our society. Apart from enhancing the level of rationality in the process of developmental tasks, there were many other considerations which prompted us to go in for five year planned programmes. Perhaps in our search for planned developmental strategy, we were guided by the experiences of East European countries. Through the planning process in all the fields of social and human activities these Countries had been able to achieve dramatic results in organising the state responsibility. A Critical analysis of the total planning programme in general, and educational planning in particular, would demonstrate that this process might have helped in the identification of specific projections and the formulation of dynamic decisions but its overall impact in solving the threatening problem of poverty, unemployment, distribution of socio-economic benefits and in

accomplishing structural and social reforms has been marginal. On the contrary, it has perpetuated conservative tendency of statusquo and the theoretical and methodological doodles of social and human development which it recommended were inadequate to the needs and aspirations of people and the environmental situation. The models were built from the apex of the pyramid, showing the way people should develop. It was assumed, that the people would conform to these models but they did not. Because of the inherent defects in the planning process, we could not mobilize and involve our masses in the developmental tasks. What we have witnessed are the glaring disparities between the urban rich and the rural poor and sectoral and regional imbalances in the developmental process. That precisely explains the reason that our planners and policy-makers are in somewhat chastened mood while recommending fresh planning orthodoxies of development.

Looking at the Sixth Five Year Plan document, one is amazed by the fact that over forty eight percent of population still lives below the poverty-line without any access to modern educational system, social welfare programmes and transport and communication systems, and approximately eighty percent people are still living in an impoverished rural environment and urban slums and are suffering various forms of socio-economic exploitation, deprivation and injustices.

It is sad but it is widely accepted today that whatever socio-economic benefits have occurred as a result of planned developmental programmes, its major share has been taken away by the articulate upper middle class and landed gentry and the rural people have been grossly neglected in this imbalanced process of development. This is a serious lapse on the part of our planners and policy-makers to allocate the major financial and manpower resources to the development of urban segment of population at the cost of rural economy. Currently, this imbalance has become a source of tension and is often reflected in various class and caste conflicts which are adversely affecting the productivity of the system.

In the present socio-economic environment, nothing is more important than a radical departure from the existing planned developmental strategies and priorities for accelerating the pace of development of our rural environment and enhancing the quality of the people living under various constraints with the application of science and technology. In fact, both the material and manpower resources of rural areas are awaiting for development. This is a unique challenge and a promising opportunity for our scientists, social scientists, technologists and planners to ensure an integrated development of rural environment by developing, designing and fabricating appropriate technologies and training programmes, suitable to the environmental situations and socio-cultural needs of the rural population.

A word of caution is necessary in this regard because the technological and developmental models which we employed during the course of planned developmental programmes were imported from developed societies of the world and I would not be exaggerating that these technological models had been declared obsolete and redundant in their own native habitats because of the emergence of new concept of development in the western developed societies of the world during the early seventies. It is on account of these developmental models that the western society has got under the grip of ecological crisis. Environmental pollution and the degradation of the quality of life. The transplanting of these models on different environmental situation and socio-cultural units was bound to generate imbalanced development of socio-economic growth, which our planners and policy-makers could not foresee, let alone quantify. Worst of all, they have generated a set of socio-psychological conflicts and various forms of alienations, consumerism, threatening, poverty, deterioration in our standards of life and fragmentation of basic human values which have become great menace to the healthy growth of our society, and our sensitive thinkers and functional elites are looking before and after, as how to arrest the flow of the impersonal forces which are operating aimlessly, yet compulsively in our social environment.

In such a situation, it is necessary for us to design and fabricate appropriate technologies which would ensure an accelerated pace of integrated rural development and improve the quality of life without dislocating the beauty of our flora and fauna. This is a delicate balance which we have to strike thoughtfully and carefully. It may be recaptulated that the deliberations of the Indian Science Congress at its Session held at Waltair, Andhra Pradesh in January, 1976 were centered around the theme of Science and Integrated Rural Development. In her inaugural address, the Prime Minister, Shrimati Indira Gandhi pointed attention to the fact that the drain of talent from village to town is an eldest form of brain drain no less notable is the economic drain from rural to urban area. She asked that this economic and talent drain from the village to the city be reversed. A working group consisting of representatives of the Department of Rural Development, Agricultural Research and Education (DARE), Science and Technology (DST), Planning Commission and the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), was set up in May, 1976 to select at least one district in each state for initiating an integrated rural development project. The choice of district was based on certain criteria, such as:

- (i) economically backward districts that have considerable development potentials;
- (ii) districts in which problem of rural unemployment and under-employment are acute;
- (iii) districts that already have certain basic developmental infrastructure; and
- (iv) districts in which scientific and technological institutions have already begun working.

With the completion of this basic exercise, the overall responsibility for implementing the programme has been entrusted to the Department of Rural Development. In the absence of an evaluatory study on the subject, it would be difficult to say with any degree of

authenticity about the performance of this project, but whatever scanty data is available, clearly indicate that we have not been able to achieve considerable success on this front.

In any analysis of the developmental strategies, we cannot afford to overlook the fundamental fact that the higher education is of strategic importance in stimulating economic growth and social change. This tends to drive us to know the direction of educational advancements and their implications on educational planning, learning methodologies, testing and evaluation techniques, curricula reforms and the viable growth of educational system in particular, and socio-economic development in general.

Immediately after the attainment of country's independence, the Government of India set up the university education commission under the chairmanship of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan "to report on Indian university education and suggest improvement and expansion that may be desirable to suit the present and future requirements of the country". Following on the recommendation of the University Education Commission Report (1948-49), the University Grants Commission was established as a statutory autonomous organization under the Parliament Act of 1956 to disburse grants and take all such, steps as it may think fit for the promotion and coordination of University education and for the determination and maintenance of standards of teaching, examination and research in universities. The educational activity in the country has witnessed a spectacular growth during the post-independence period due to a combination of factors and has come to be identified as a great leap forward. As against 19 universities and some 450 colleges with a total enrolment of 2,50,000 students at the time of independence, the country has acquired 112 universities, 12 institutions deemed to be universities and 4,722 colleges with a total enrolment of 27,52,437 students as given in the annual report of 1980-81 of the University Grants Commission. The number of students enrolment would have been still higher, had the University Grants Commission not excluded students enrolment in intermediate, pre-university and pre-professional

classes from its report.

Though the planning of education was introduced in fifties with the idea of evolving an effective strategy for the development of educational system, however, the growth has occurred not in response to the planning processes, but under the dictates of socio-political pressures. The educational planners have been primarily concerned with the statistics of growth potential, patterns and conditions of growth but they did little professional exercise how far the development of education is going to bring about the distribution of educational opportunities across different regional or social groups of the population, and how to re-orient and re-organize the educational system in both structural and substantive terms to make it functionally more efficient and effective? Its main contribution has been to map out a pattern of development that would assure a more or less linear expansion of status quo. There is a growing consensus that this lopsided expansion of higher education in the country has brought the educational system to a critical point. Its implications can be seen on the dilution of quality of educational standards, the deterioration of excellence in the styles of teaching, growing student indiscipline and general poverty in the management and administration of universities.

The major problem which is bothering the educational planners and policy-makers, is how to reconcile between quantity and quality of education, and quality and equality of education? Is there any inherent contradiction between them? The advocates of excellence in education believe that if students from impoverished socio-economic backgrounds with poor motivation and inadequate mental preparation are admitted in the system they are bound to spell disaster to the viable growth of the system, as it has happened on the contemporary educational scene. If we follow this assumption, it would mean that we would be keeping students belonging to rural communities and urban slums away from the system of higher education and our objective of equalisation of educational opportunity would remain an elusive dream. Let me tell you a little bluntly that if we keep students belonging to culturally and

economically backward communities away from the system, we would not only be only blocking the way to their socio-economic mobility but would be inviting danger to our political and national stability and growth.

The major issue before us is how to promote, encourage and nurture talent drawn especially from the impoverished rural environment and urban slums? We cannot afford the potential talent to remain untapped because he is born in a surrounding where physical facilities of the actualization of his potential do not exist. It is necessary to evolve a mechanism for identifying a talent from these communities and providing him necessary educational and other facilities for the blossoming of his creative genius. It is true that the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has introduced a scheme of science talent search some years ago, but I can say it on the basis of my knowledge and experience that most of the students selected under this scheme have come primarily from middle and upper classes and hardly any from the impoverished home got a chance. A more flexible and open ended scheme is needed which would be able to draw children at quite an early age especially from the impoverished home.

In any analysis of the educational development in the country we should not overlook the fundamental fact, that the system of education which we have got today is a legacy of the colonial rulers in our country. In the name of educational reforms, we went on importing textbooks, curricula development models, evaluation techniques and testing tools, educational innovations and experimental models either from the United States or USSR or other European countries during the post independence period and grafted them on the British system of education. This process of borrowing and following the methods of permutation and combination have resulted in making the system highly complex and bureaucratized. This process has generated a number of socio-psychological conflicts and we are now fruitlessly trying to emancipate ourselves from foreign educational models.

It would be interesting to note that most of our highly innovative educational experiments could not make a dent either in arresting the deterioration in the quality of education or bringing about an improvement in the structure and the institutional framework of the university system. Surprisingly, the implementation of most of these programmes was blocked by the powerful lobbies which have come to dominate in various bodies of the university. The procedure of approving any innovative programme by the university systems has become so complicated and bureaucratized that it takes a long time for any educational reform to go through various procedural formalities, like obtaining of the approval of the academic council, syndicate, senate and court. How to debureaucratize the governance models of our university system so that we could implement the desired educational innovations and experimental models expeditiously? This is an area which we have to examine in-depth so that the university system becomes more dynamic and open-ended and responsive to the necessary change.

Another major weakness in the system which has currently assumed a considerable threat to the smooth functioning of institutions of higher learning relates to the politicization of campuses. Most of our campuses have become highly politicised and the politics is being brought to the campus environment by various political groups and parties who are using students for the advancement of their political prospects. It is rarely one comes across students strikes, dharnas, gheraos of the Vice-Chancellor, or the faculty member by the student community purely on account of the redressal of academic grievances. Most of the students strikes are sponsored by the vested political groups in which students either willingly or un-willingly get involved without knowing what they are fighting for.

This phenomenon is not only confined to the student community but our academic community is no exception to this rule. In fact, the academic community too has become highly politicized by aligning itself with one political party or another for the advancement of its

ephemeral interests. It has been observed that it is the academic community which often triggers students power into action and is primarily responsible for the student violence and rampages in campuses. How to introduce the concept of accountability in our campuses is a problem of problems. Currently our academics are answerable to none except in the widest sense of term to the Vice-Chancellor. Can't we evolve a mechanism of rewards and punishments in the educational system? At present there is no method by which a good and excellent teacher can be rewarded and unmotivated teacher is reprimanded and debarred from the profession for his lack of commitment to the professional and intellectual ethics. Most of our teachers consider teaching as a perfunctory and peripheral activity and give importance to the research work in the entire educational endeavour. It is understandable because the system gives importance to research and publication work while determining the promotional mobility of the teacher in terms of his career advancement. Research work, both basic and applied, is absolutely necessary for the extension of the frontiers of knowledge and stimulating the process of industrial development. But research and teaching activities are not opposed to each other rather they complement each other and enrich the entire educational endeavour. We must strike a balance between the research work and the teaching activity in the entire educational process for the healthy growth of the system.

While analysing the direction of educational development, one is often struck by the fact that our planners and policy-makers did not pay adequate attention to the development of human resources. By development of human resources, I mean the acquisition of functional capability accompanied with high degree of moral and intellectual integrity. The first, second and third Five Year Plan carried chapter on 'education' but did not say anything about the manpower or human resources development. It is only in the fourth five year plan that a chapter on education was combined with manpower development. The irony of situation is that while expanding the educational system, the

planners did not care to plan it in terms of our manpower needs in the emerging and foreseeable future. The linkage between educational developments and manpower projections was not coherently spelt out even in professional, science and technological courses. This lopsided expansion of education has created a threatening problem of educated unemployment which is posing a danger to the productivity and economy of our country. The educational priorities were so ill-matched that in 1962 on the eve of Chinese aggression, we suddenly discovered serious shortages of our scientific and technological manpower. This discovery led to an expansion of scientific and technological education at an accelerated rate. Since we did not carry out any professional exercise while expanding scientific and technical education, we ran into serious trouble of unemployment problem of engineering graduates and postgraduate in the late sixties and early seventies. We achieved surplus in some areas of highly skilled manpower, but at the medium level we experienced shortages of manpower, and this mismatch in manpower projection has greatly disturbed our developmental programmes. The manpower planning should therefore be done seriously while expanding educational facilities for achieving an integrated socio-economic development in the country.

Granted that our growth strategy has brought the system to a critical point but this should not lead to the conclusion that we should halt the expansion of higher educational facilities in the country. But while expanding the system, we must give adequate attention to the quality of educational standards. Hardly four percent of our total population has been accommodated in the system, whereas in the developed societies of the world this percentage is very much higher ranging even from fifteen to twenty percent. What is needed is a balance between quality and quantity, and quality and equality for achieving a harmonious growth of our educational system. This need not be assumed that I am advocating further proliferation of colleges and universities but what I am suggesting is of effective and efficient utilisation of the existing physical facilities. Considering the pressure on the system we have to

popularise alternative channels of the education by strengthening 'correspondence courses' and by establishing an Open University in the country. The Open University, London has done a remarkable job in providing educational opportunities to students who could not enter in the formal system of education due to a number of constraints. Even most of the developing societies have been able to establish an Open University in their respective countries. Why can't we expedite the process of establishing an Open University when we have got both hardwares and softwares.

The picture of Indian campus environment may look to be gloomy, but it should not dismay us. I would like to conclude this address with a note of optimism because of my great faith in the educational process. It is only through education that we can bring about a change in the individual behaviour, provide him with a scientific temper, capacity of adventurous spirit, and a self-reliance to face any challenge with firmness and foresight. If education has succeeded in providing you the basic human values and a capacity to rely on your inner resources it has served the necessary purpose.

I congratulate all the graduates and postgraduates who have received degrees, medals and prizes for the distinction conferred on them adds a reward for their talent and hard work. Let me exhort you to dedicate yourself to the noble task of applying the knowledge acquired by you to the welfare of mankind, in general, and our fellow countrymen, in particular. On this auspicious occasion, I pray almighty to give you enough inner strength to face the challenges you face in your life. Wherever you are, I do hope that you will work with dedication, zeal and commitment in building a new India as visualised by our great seers, thinkers and leaders, like Mahatma Gandhi, Sir Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.

Jai Hind

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