

Seventeenth Convocation held on April 20, 1983

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Mr. Chancellor, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, distinguished members of the faculty, young students, ladies and gentlemen.

At the outset I must express my deep and sincere sense of gratitude to the university authorities in general and the Chancellor and the Vice-Chancellor in particular for having done me the honour of asking me to deliver the Convocation address for this year. It is a gesture of large-heartedness and generosity, which I hardly deserve and, therefore, I deem it a great privilege to be amidst you this morning.

It is also my very pleasant duty to offer my heart-felt greetings and felicitations to you, my young friends, for the award of degrees and medals today for your hard-earned and well-deserved achievements. Quite a few of you would be leaving the university today and entering life. I wish you all success in your new ventures, whatever these may be and wherever these may take you. Some of you will continue to remain in the university for higher academic pursuits. I also wish you well in your efforts.

Whether you are leaving the portals of the university or are still staying on, it will perhaps be worthwhile for you at least to remember a few things. First you should never forget that you belong to a select group in society who have had the good fortune of receiving higher education. This should, in turn, inculcate in you humility and a sense of obligation to society in general and to your family in particular, which have enabled you to enjoy this privilege. You are, in a manner of speaking, indebted to both of them and it becomes your bounden duty to take a pledge to day to extend a helping hand to your less fortunate brethren, be they in society in general or in the family in particular. For, after all, definitionally, as also according to Indian tradition, society

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is just an extension of the family even at the global level. The joint family system may be tending to break down under the twin impacts of westernization and urbanization but don't forget that your parents and parents in laws, as the case may be, still treat you in India, not merely as their own, but also family's insurance against a rainy day. Education will be a waste if you fail to provide them an umbrella.

Secondly, you have also to remember that an educational institution is known by its students, which, like your teachers, stands to shine in your reflected glory and, particularly, in the values that you bring to bear on your thought processes, actions and behaviour. It is, however, a two-way obligation. It is, therefore, necessary to point out in this context that educational institutions are also a mould, teachers the master craftsmen and students the products of their art. It is not without reason that the concept of alma mater is used to describe educational institutions, inclusive of teachers. Did not Abraham Lincoln say, "Whatever I am, and whatever I hope to be, I owe to my angel-like mother". You have to nurture the same sentiment towards your university and teachers. Of course, they have also to deserve and work for the cultivation of that feeling.

The present day crisis in higher education, among others, is one of alienation of teachers, students and the administration from the educational institutions of which they are an organic part. It is basically a crisis of belongingness which can only be resolved through a process of mutual owning of each other in a spirit of understanding, good will and co-operation. If this is to happen, the present day attitude of commercialization, characterising the pattern of relationships among teachers, students and administration, has to yield place to a mutually re-inforcing partnership and concern for institution-building.

This, in turn, raises the question whether enough thought has been given and a genuine effort made to involve the teachers, students and the administration in the management of educational institutions with sharing of power and responsibility and that also with a sense of

accountability, all this happening as part and parcel of a system that admits both of reward and punishment in the larger interest of the institution without discrimination and outside interference of powers that be. Has any attempt been made to evolve and experiment with a system of educational administration which is of, by and for teachers, students and administration - a case of participatory management, not just from a trade union angle (which, of course, cannot be ignored in a democratic system that we are fortunate to have) but also, and more importantly, from the view point of democratic management which emphasizes in equal measure a system of rights and duties. Were we not taught in our civics classes that it is in the world of duties alone that rights have any significance or the essence of ideal citizenship lies in the right ordering of loyalties which, to my way of thinking, is the proper definition of civic culture as an ideal type and which, in essence, stands for a system of co-existing but transcending loyalties : from the self to the family, from the family to the neighbourhood, from the neighbourhood to the city, from the city to the region, from the region to the country and from the country to the world. I, therefore, do not subscribe to any inherent dichotomy, let alone contradiction between the so-called phenomenon of sub-nationalism and nationalism. In fact, I am not very happy with the theoretical postulate of sub-nationalism itself. I have often wondered whether it should not be preferable to conceptualise it in terms of sub-sets or levels of nationalism itself with the possibility of its co-existence with an over-arching national identity.

This digression apart, let us, again, turn for a while to the issue of involvement which, basically speaking, needs to be discussed against the broader perspective of national policy on higher education for independent India in terms of goals, values and needs. I am not inclined to share entirely the cynical view that the perspective itself is non-existent, though I am certainly of the opinion that it has not been operationalised earnestly, let alone the question of its being pursued with a missionary zeal.

Few would disagree that higher education in India should be treated as an investment into nation-building, if one were to talk about it in terms of a single, or at any rate, a dominant goal. It is not a new idea as the various commissions on Higher Education in India have already talked about it in that fashion. Even at the risk of a digression, I would like to make the point that I have deliberately used the term nation-building to contrast it from state-building. It is true that state-building is, to some extent, implied in the process of nation-building also. But it would be wrong to assume that, if state-building takes place, nation building would automatically follow. It is for this reason that both Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, among others, stood for nation-building, a process in which state power is treated as one of the instruments and not the instrument of nation-building, let alone the question of its being treated as an end in itself. It is people's involvement which is the crux of the nation-building process, though the elite have to play the role of a catalytic agent. The truth of the matter, however, is that, as in the colonial past, the government continues to be treated by the vast masses of the people as a Ma-Bap institution and they still think that nation-building is the exclusive obligation of the ruling elite. The universities were expected to provide the proverbial critical dent in this persisting psychology of colonialism by reaching out to the community with teachers and students playing a leadership role as agents of change. But this has not happened so far. Political leadership has also failed to mobilise the community in the nation-building process. I earnestly wish that the teachers and the students of this university may serve as path-finders in this regard.

Another need of the hour is that education in general and higher education in particular is to be value-based. The Preamble to the Constitution provides the best enunciation of values which independent India is expected to pursue, with educational institutions serving as an important socializing agent. It will not be out of place to re-capitulate what the Preamble has to say on this score:

WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a SOVEREIGN, SOCIALIST, SECULAR, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC and to secure to all its citizens :

JUSTICE, social, economic and political ;

LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

EQUALITY of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all.

FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation;

IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY this twenty- sixth day of November, 1949, do HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION .

Here, again, we have failed rather miserably. The educational institutions themselves are as much a helpless prey of crisis of values as the country as a whole. The tide has to turn before it is too late. The educational institutions in general and the universities in particular, among others, have to address themselves to the crucial task of filling the value-vacuum in which the country seems to be caught up to-day.

It is also being genuinely felt that education should be need-based, if it is to imbue the students with a sense of purpose and with dignity of labour, patriotism and discipline as values, without which no country has really reached the take off stage in history. Education has to train the students to apply both their mind and hands with equal zest, dexterity, skill and dignity. Did not Mahatma Gandhi advocate :

I hold that true education of the intellect can only come through a proper exercise and training of the bodily organs, e. g., hands, eyes, ears, nose, etc. In other words, an intelligent use of the bodily organs in a child provides the best and quickest way of developing his intellect. But unless the development of the mind and body goes hand in hand

with a corresponding awakening of the soul, the former alone would prove to be a poor lop-sided affair. By spiritual training I mean education of the heart. A proper and all-round development of the mind, therefore, can take place only when it proceeds particularly with the education of the physical and spiritual faculties of the child. They constitute an indivisible whole. According to this theory, therefore, it would be a gross fallacy to suppose that they can be developed piecemeal or independently of one another.

I would develop in the child his hands, his brain and his soul. The hands have almost atrophied. The soul has been altogether ignored.

Even an atheist would believe that theoretical knowledge unless combined with practical application does not give the requisite sense of purpose to students in education, let alone the question of challenging and getting the best out of the inherent creative potential in them. One basic reason of unrest in university campuses is that students are not convinced that the education that they are receiving serves any purpose either for them as individuals or for the country. Of course, this is more true of students of Social sciences and Humanities, but, perhaps, others are not entirely immune from this feeling. The emphasis on vocational education is a step in the right direction, but this alone is not enough. What we need is a flexible and innovative educational structure. For this it is necessary that we have the courage to give up stereo types in education, developed either in the West or in the East, to whatever extent necessary and are prepared to have a fresh look at our educational system from the point of view of our needs and that also in a spirit of experimentation and discovery.

I would, therefore, urge upon the teachers and students of this university and, through them, of other universities as well to join hands in the exciting adventure of educational reconstruction in India so that it becomes an instrument rational creativity, self-fulfilment, nation-building and universal brotherhood. Then alone we shall be able to live

upto and realise the dream of poet Tagore. Let us, therefore, pray with him in the end :

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 the dreary desert sand of dead habit;

Where the mind is led forward by thee into everwidening thought and action;

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

20.4.83