

NORTH BENGAL UNIVERSITY CONVOCATION.

Address by

Professor S. Nurul Hasan,

C h a n c e l l o r .

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Professor Hiren Mukherjee, Professor Paintal, Shri Sudhi Prodhan, Professor Gourinath Shastri, recipients of Doctorate Degrees, graduates of the year, ladies and gentlemen :

On behalf of the University I have great pleasure in thanking the three distinguished recipients of honorary degrees for having agreed to join the alumni of the University. Their association with the University community will, I have no doubt, be a source of inspiration to the present and coming generations of its students. Professor Hiren Mukherjee has been honoured by many Universities but more and more Universities want him to be associated with their community because his life, his scholarship, his statemanship and dedication to national values, represent an ideal which the youth could well emulate. Shri Prodhan has set an example of self-sacrifice in the cause of the nation and has enriched the cultural life of Bengal. Professor Paintal is not only a distinguished teacher, an outstanding scientist but is a patron of learning. We are happy that we can now claim that they are one of us.

On behalf of the University I would like to express our sincere thanks to Professor Gouri Nath Shastri who has graced this Convocation as Chief Guest and whose inspiring address will fondly be remembered by all those who are now leaving the portals of the University.

I was happy to hear the address of our distinguished Vice-Chancellor and the account of the progress of the University which has made under his stewardship. This University has a special role to play in the social, economic, intellectual, scientific and cultural progress of the people of North Bengal. I am gratified that this University is making serious efforts to achieve the objectives for which it was established.

Since I addressed your Convocation last year, momentous changes have been taken place in our own country as well as abroad. In India, the threat to the unity and integrity of the nation has increased and the security environment in our region has deteriorated. Internationally, a cold war is gradually yielding place to a period of co-operation. The democratic forces appear to be on the ascendant and yet some fundamental assumptions behind social organisation are being challenged. The threat of a nuclear holocaust has certainly receded. The impending freedom of Namibia and the release of Nelson Mandela are milestones in the struggle which humanity has raised against apartheid. We in our country can take justifiable pride in the fact that we have been in the forefront of the world struggle against nuclear threat and the hated system of apartheid. Yet this mixed picture of light and darkness demands that we should re-evaluate the basic postulates of our thought so that we are not swept away by the powerful currents of world events. The Universities have a special role to play in assisting the nation to clarify its objectives and goals.

I would respectfully submit that significant changes which are taking place in our country and the world bear out the fundamental soundness of the teachings of our great national leaders, of the goals enshrined in our Constitution and of the collective wisdom of our national movement. Our Constitution enjoins upon us to build a secular, socialist and democratic society in our country. Since secularism is sought to be undermined by forces of communalism, casteism and fundamentalism of different hues and shades, we must reaffirm our commitment to this concept. There can be no compromise in the matter of secularism. If the country's unity and integrity and its strength is to be maintained and the cohesiveness of its social fabric safeguarded. We must preserve and respect the religious and cultural rights of all communities, subject to the normal precaution that rights of one community should not be allowed to transgress upon those of the others. But, in any case, the doctrine of absolute equality before the law, the concept of equality of opportunity, and of positive discrimination in favour of the weaker sections of society—and the less developed regions of the country have to be ensured. Narrowmindedness, obscurantism, religious or communal exclusivity,

and an outlook of toleration, compassion, enlightenment, rationality and scientific approach must be encouraged. We should continually review the changing situation, in the country and the world so that we can interpret secularism in the changing environment.

Let us recall the words of our Constitution that it shall be the duty of every citizen of India "to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities"; and that we should "value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture"

The concept of socialism, whose attainment is a nationally accepted objective in our country, is unfortunately under-attack by the champions of free-market economy. Our Constitution directs us to establish a social order in which justice, social, economic and political shall inform all the institutions of the national life ; that the State shall strive to minimise the inequalities in income, and endeavour to eliminate inequalities in status, facilities and opportunities, not only amongst individuals but also amongst groups of people residing in different areas or engaged in different vocations. We should recognise that all citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood and that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to subserve the common good ; that the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment. We have to strive to bring about equality of opportunity, to make provision for securing the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, and in other cases of undeserved want. We are directed by our Constitution to secure to all workers, agricultural, industrial or otherwise, work, a living wage, conditions of work ensuring a decent standard of life and full enjoyment of leisure, social and cultural opportunities. It is the duties of the Universities to keep suggesting how best to translate these ideals into concrete programmes and to develop science and technology to a level that these objectives can be achieved.

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Fortunately, there has never been any flagging in our commitments to democracy, to decentralisation of authority and the involvement of the masses of our people in decision making. It is our fundamental right to have freedom of thought, speech and association and to periodically select our rulers. We now have the Ninth Lok Sabha. In its election, the people have again shown that they can choose not only law makers but also their rulers. But democracy is a process that needs to be enriched continuously in the light of experience. A debate is going on for example, about reform of electoral law and about establishment of Panchayati Raj institutions. In keeping with our ideals, the Universities must contribute to this debate in a constructive and meaningful way.

I have no doubt that the overwhelming majority of the people of our country are committed to maintain the democratic and secular character of our State and society and to strive for the goal of socialism. But I have taken the liberty of emphasising the important role which the Universities must play in preserving our commitment to these ideals.

To those who have received the degrees, diplomas and medals, I offer my heartiest congratulations and blessings for a very successful life in the service of the nation. May they bring glory to their alma mater and enrich national life.

JAI HIND.