

Second Convocation held on October 10, 1966

Shrimati Indira Gandhi*

Madam Chancellor, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, members of the Teaching Staff, and New Graduates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I thank you Madam Chancellor for giving me this opportunity of coming here and of forging a link with yet another University and another set of young people and educationists. Your University as you stressed, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, is a young one. But the traditions of education in Bengal is, by no means, new.

Bengal has been in the forefront of our intellectual renaissance and our nationalist awakening. From the time of the first of our modems,

Raja Rammohun Roy, after whom this township is so aptly named, down to the present day, the number of great sons and daughters of Bengal, who have enriched and ennobled our national life is legion. The contribution of Bengal is profound and far-reaching in every field of Indian Endeavour whether it be literature or Science, a spiritual quest or education. .

The new India of which we are the builders, could not have been possible without Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Vivekananda, without Bankimchandra, Madhusudan, Tagore, Sarojini Naidu and Sarat Chandra, without Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Asutosh Mukherjee, without Surendra Nath Banet:iee, Bepin Chandra Pal, Chitta Ranjan Das, Subhas Bose and Dr. B. C. Roy, and without Jagadish Chandra Bose and P. C. Ray. For every name listed here I am conscious of having left out many more. As we are assembled here, let us recall the quest and work of these immortals and find strength and inspiration. from them.

***Prime Minister, Government of India,**

This occasion is more than a ceremonial. It marks a turning point in the lives of young graduates. You move on to greater responsibility in life. From being receiver you are now becoming givers. The student stage is a stage of preparation. Society owes its young an education. After School and College the educated young owe society a duty. This duty is to place the skills they have learnt and the knowledge they have earned at the disposal of the society. Amongst the students leaving the gates of the University will be producers, managers, Teachers and Scientists, Scholars and Artists, the leaders and pace-setters.

When 19 years ago, our country started on its career of freedom, Jawaharlal Nehru invited the young to join in the wonderful adventure of building a new India. That call is as relevant to-day as it was in 1947, for a nation is not built in a mere score of years. You of to-day; even if you did not have the privilege of working for the achievement of freedom can still partake to the adventure of consolidating that freedom. Therefore, you should regard yourselves as pioneers. You have much to do which has not been done before. What greater adventure can there be than to bring new life to our people.

The newspapers sometimes bring news of restlessness among our young people, of strikes and fasts, of direct action and clashes. To some extent this restlessness reflects the dynamism of youth. To that extent the sentiment is welcome. But sometimes it does seem as though some of our young people are opposed to the very existence of authority. Is this a phase or a trend? It is important that we should seek to know why our students feel and act in this way.

This psychological understanding is generally lacking. Between the outlook of the young and the outlook of those who are in places of power, Governmental or Social, there seems to be a gap of non-comprehension. This is not only true of India but the world over. The revolt and the reaction of the youth against the authority of any kind is a natural process necessary to grow into adulthood. But the urge to revolt is a force which can be used positively or negatively. In its positive

form it becomes the will to achievement.

It is dissatisfaction with the times which has led people to seek new answers to old questions, and has produced social, religious, educational and political reformers. In earlier times, it led to the exploration of new areas, and in modern times, mountaineering and other adventurous expeditions are expressions of the same spirit. The same questioning and rejecting spirit has produced new inventions in Science, medicines and other fields.

In the vastness of our universe, man is a tiny creature; his achievement is of imagination, of will and of endeavour. He pits himself against nature to conquer his own inferiority. In so doing, he has harnessed the forces of nature for his own ends. As the development of communication makes the earth smaller, man seeks the exploration of outer space. All this has generated new ferment, in youth and has also created many new problems of adjustments to constant change. Mass media have given us easier access to knowledge, putting across national barriers. What happens in the rest of the world affects young people in each country. The conflict of the generations with youth wanting certainties and simpler solutions and age opting for compromises gets sharpened. This is all the more so in post independent India when present generation has been uprooted from its old standard and is groping to something new.

We are the inheritors of an ancient culture, which has sustained our people through their long history and has strengthened them to meet countless trials and tribulations. Many of its ideas and values are timeless. But to make them relevant to our own lives, we must ever renew them and cleanse them of all that is mere superstition or meaningless rituals, accumulated and petrified over the centuries. You must know our traditions and our culture, for only then can you judge what must be kept and what weeded out, what is energising and what is dead weight. You can not belong to the world unless you belong to your own culture and your own nation. A tree must have roots. Though

the roots go deep into the ground, the tree itself grows up into the sky towards the sun. So must we turn our faces and our steps towards the future though our roots remain in the past. .

I believe in our ancient culture, but I believe also in modernity, for it has opened our wide vistas of opportunity; it has put within our reach the means of solving age old problems.

Present day youth is becoming clearer about their personal goal educational facilities have expanded. There are more institutions and newer courses of studies. Scholarships are more, plentiful, social mobility has increased, opportunities for travel and access to sources and information have widened. Our young people are taking advantage of those and have, in the process, been both agents of equality and the provider of skills which the nation needs. You may not be aware that 5'0% of all Engineers in the country are under 30 years of age similarly 70% of all women with post graduate qualifications are below 30 years.

As opportunities increase, so does aspiration. This is true of individuals and societies. Scholars of social change tell us that the early stage of economic development are accompanied by" considerable dissatisfaction. The dissatisfaction we see around us is not so much due to failure to achieve set targets as to the success achieved in moving forward. People realise they have a right to ask for more.

A changing society is not always as well administered as a static one. Quick increase in opportunities is also a phase when the right person is not always found for the right job. This brings me to the point of standards. In some ways perhaps standards have fallen. It may be that the average has fallen because of the speedy increase in numbers, but there is no decrease either in the number of the quality of talented persons. On the contrary, there is more talent, 'because the numbers have increased. Talent is not a gift of birth but grows with training. Because of the increase in education opportunities and of world awareness, the talent of our young people has blossomed forth, the best

of our young atomic and biological scientists, our young economists and doctors, our young engineers and artists vie with their counterparts elsewhere in the world. The number of Indians going to teach in the great universities of the world is not small and so many of them are surprisingly young. One of the driving forces of freedom was that we should overcome the sense of inferiority bred by foreign rule and technological backwardness. That sense of inferiority like the old sense of helplessness is now growing. But much of this aspiration has remained personal aspiration, understood in terms of income, position and fame and not related to group or national aspiration. Perhaps this is the result of some fault of our educational system or a consequence of our existing social institutions.

We must do more to harness the energies of the young people. The number of young people keen to render social service has not diminished, but unlike some other developing countries, we have not yet evolved any scheme of social service for students as part of the educational system. I want you, students and young people, to assert yourselves and not to be acquiescent. But assertion is creative, not destructive. While it might sometimes oppose discipline it also implies a duty to resist the less worthy ideas or actions among your own kind. May I remind you of a lesson in History? It was because of men who contented to keep quiet out of weakness of spirit that organized hooligans under Hitler could rise to power in Germany misusing the democratic apparatus. If our democracy is to prosper, we must learn to assert our rights to orderly Government.

To seek redress of grievances is natural. But many of the unseemly incidents we have recently witnessed have not arisen from any grievance. The most ordinary occurrences touch off a riot. I appeal to students to give up this habit of resorting to methods of the street. For that does not befit the educated people. As Swami Vivekananda said "True education is a training of individuals to will rightly and efficiently". The community must keep in check all outbursts or violence and

lawlessness which after all are touched off by a very small minority. Violence, Gandhiji has pointed out, is man's main problem. We in India, despite Gandhiji, can not claim to be more non-violent than other people. Nations whom we sometimes condescendingly call materialists, have shown far more self-restraint.

Some people have said that the recent student unrest is an expression of the alienation of the youth from society. Why should this be so? This country is yours; its future is what you make it. The welfare of our people is in your hands. There is no individual advance for you except through the uplift of your fellow beings. There can be no running away from responsibilities. As Lincoln said "We can not escape history". Each hour of the day, each one of us is by his actions shaping the future of this country. The problem before you and all of us is how to make good use of the knowledge of the world-how to make right use of the power which this expanding knowledge is bestowing upon us. We cannot mould our environment or control what happens. But we can and we should control our reactions to events. In aiming for larger goods we help ourselves. In identifying ourselves with larger causes we ourselves gain in stature.

More than a century ago, Raja Rammohun Roy started a movement which led to the renaissance of India through Indian nationalism combined with social reform and modernism. Some decades later, the idea of "Swadeshi" was born in Bengal. Today 19 years after Independence, in some ways India stands on the threshold of a new renaissance. We have to build this new India and you are the builder. We have to give new life and new meaning to "Swadeshi", to nationalism to modernism. We have to make an industrial, agricultural and technological revolution consistent with our self-respect and national pride, without losing our soul, our culture or our values. We have to rediscover faith and purpose not in words and slogans, but in Work, in action in attitudes.

Bengal has achieved much. More than. Calcutta, Durgapur today symbolises the new India. Durgapur constitutes the largest single complex of heavy industry in India to-day. And where Industry ends Agriculture begins with the D. V.C. canals taking off from the Durgapur barrage. One of our great new scientific laboratories is also located there. This University also represents the new Bengal and the new India. You are located in a most strategic area-in the narrow corridor which links the North Eastern region with the rest of the country. You are in a position of vantage to study the country's external relation in the context of our immediate neighbour-sub-Himalayan, Trans Himalayan and to the South-East Pakistan. I would welcome specialisation in area studies of this kind-the historical, political and economic situation and cultural mood of these neighbouring territories. The foreign policy is our first defence, for it seeks to make friends and to avoid war. Economic development and national unity are our best defence, for they make our nation strong. But foreign policy must be based on an intimate knowledge and feeling for current international developments. This is not a matter for foreign office alone. Area-study by independent scholars, by Universities such as yours would be invaluable. It is also important to know the language of this area.

Our dreams are for an India rid of proverty, for an India where political liberty, economic equality and social justice prevail. By building such an India, we shall be strong but even to build such an India we need to be strong. We desire the development of our national and individual life but defence, to-day is the yoke-fellow of development. Our strength should be thought of not only in terms of the ability of our valiant fighting forces. It consists equally in our ability to maintain order and domestic peace, in our devotion to the task of increasing production and improving skills, in our resolve to attain speedy self-reliance.

of the sense of social equality. There is no justification for gloom or defeatism.

So I call upon you, builders, creators and leaders, to accept the challenge. Do not let the fog and mist of the valley depress you. You live in the shadow of the mighty Himalaya which has inspired poets and philosophers, sportsmen and saints. May they inspire in you a love for India and appreciation of her beauty and quality, her riches of the past and her vast potential for the future. Only if you are aware of all these, can you truly serve her. Talking of sensitivity to life and nature, Tagore said, "The Great human society are the creation, not of profiteers. but of dreamers". May you have the courage, perseverance and will to translate your dreams into realities.

May I congratulate all those who have won distinction or who are new graduates and may I wish your University well. Thank you.

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