



**Address
by the
Chief Guest**



Hon'ble Chancellor Shri. Gopal Krishna Gandhi, Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor Prof. A. Basumajumdar, Members of the Court, Teachers, Students, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am thankful to the Hon'ble Chancellor and other functionaries of the university, particularly the Vice-Chancellor, for inviting me to join you at the annual convocation, which arguably is the most important event in the academic calendar. The convocation is a record as well as a profile of the intellectual achievements of the institution, contributed and enriched by the successive set of students every year. The graduation, therefore, has a larger meaning than individual distinction, which indeed it is, but it also marks the enrichment of the intellectual collective which the University has nourished over the years. As such congratulating the new graduates, which I do with great pleasure, is not a purely customary and formal expression of appreciation, but a recognition of their new location in society as members of the intellectual community and the responsibilities associated with it.

The convocation which marks an important stage in academic life provides an opportunity for self-introspection and to relate the acquired knowledge to the imperatives of social requirements. That would depend upon how the purpose of education is conceived. It is generally accepted that education fulfills multiple purposes. It is, among others, a means of socialization and a way to realize one's obligation to society. In each epoch social requirements are different and so are the expectations from the educated. The most successful education is one which correctly locates this requirement and moulds the educational programme accordingly. The search for an appropriate educational paradigm is therefore a continuous process in every society, particularly in periods of transition. What should be that paradigm for Indian society, which is undergoing unprecedented cultural and intellectual transformation, is a question engaging serious attention today. I would like to use this opportunity to draw your attention to some aspects of this concern.

The current discussion and debate on higher education is occasioned partly by the globally experienced explosion in knowledge and partly by the internal pressures to modernize the existing system. There is general recognition that the existing system is 'not adequate in relation to our needs': it is rigid and stagnant, unwieldy and unmanageable, insensitive to social justice

and unable to excite intellectual curiosity. 'The world around us has changed dramatically' observed the Committee on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Universities, set up by the University Grants Commission (UGC) under the chairmanship of Prof. Yashpal, 'but our higher education continues to operate in the old policy frame. There is a need for a major paradigm shift in this sector which would not happen with small incremental and unrelated changes here and there'. Such a paradigm shift should have happened much earlier, immediately after independence, the road map for which was drawn up in several excellent reports like those by D.S. Kothari and S.Radhakrishnan. Yet, what was actually undertaken did not go beyond marginal changes and as a consequence the structure inherited from the colonial rule persisted, which obviously was not suited to the requirements of a post-colonial society, since the colonial system was not meant to educate the 'natives', but to command their intellectual resources in service of its interests.

Colonialism had created an enclavised system which restricted access to a few, subordinated quality to ideological imperatives and hardly paid any heed to the problem of social justice. The legacy of this system has been quite enduring and has adversely affected the quality of educational development in independent India. Nevertheless, the country has moved towards a modern system, which despite its inadequacies has created a resource base of considerable proportions, both intellectual and infrastructural. At the time of independence facilities for higher education were very limited. Then the number of universities and colleges was only 20 and 496 respectively and the enrollment of students was about 2,15,000. They have now increased to 400 universities, 19000 colleges and 112 lakhs students respectively. In absolute terms these figures appear impressive. But not so in relative terms. The number of students pursuing higher education is only about ten percent of the eligible category of the age group of 18 to 23. If so, higher education continues to be an enclavised system with poor, particularly the Dalits, Adivasis and women not able to benefit from it adequately. The implication of inadequate access is that higher education has not yet achieved a democratic character and the state has not been able to provide the necessary facilities for it. In order to impart a democratic character the primary requirement is adequate number of institutions, particularly in rural areas. The National Knowledge Commission (NKC), set up to advise the Government on higher education, has recommended the creation of 1500 universities. Whether the setting up of

universities without the creation of conditions which would ensure a groundswell at the base of higher education is an appropriate step for achieving greater access is debatable. If the purpose is to ensure greater access what is urgently required is the large scale increase in the number of colleges. It goes without saying that without foundation it is not possible to build the superstructure. The main weakness of higher education today is that it is built on a weak foundation, both in numbers and content. The Planning Commission is concerned with numbers when it sets the target of 15% access for the 11th Plan. But 15% is a rather modest target which some states like Kerala have already achieved. If India is to emerge as a major player in the global knowledge society much larger intellectual base would be required. Both the NKC and the UGC recognize it in their reports on higher education.

A matter of much worry among educationists appears to be the declining quality of higher education, about which there is near unanimity in all assessments. The NKC admits that 'curricula have almost remained unchanged for decades, have not kept pace with the times, let alone with the extending frontiers of knowledge'. If a few 'centres of excellence' are excluded the quality of education imparted in other institutions, private, government or self-financing, is so poor, both in terms of infra-structure and intellectual resources that they do not deserve to be recognized as institutions of higher education. Understandably the temptation is to create 'institutions which are exemplars of excellence'. In pursuance of it central universities are being set up in all states and a few 'world class universities' are being planned. The filtration theory which informs this view is fundamentally unjust and hence flawed. In a country like India where excellence has to be sought through equity and inclusion and not through separation and exclusion. This is not to suggest that excellence is not to be pursued; but to indicate that excellence is to be sought in as wide a social base as possible.

Such a perspective would imply that the improvement in the quality of higher education would largely depend upon the nature of undergraduate system, which is currently the weakest part of the structure. Yet, in the present dispensation it receives least attention. All discussion, initiatives and investment now concentrate on professional education, so much so that higher education is identified with professional courses. The education in humanities, social sciences and pure sciences in which the overwhelming majority of students, more than 80%, are enrolled

is treated as a poor cousin. As a result the undergraduate education in the country is in an appalling state, without adequate number of qualified teachers, necessary infrastructural facilities and sufficient intellectual resources. The importance of reforming the undergraduate system which has remained stagnant for long is now being realized. Both Yashpal committee and NKC, though have not gone into the details, have urged the immediate overhauling of the undergraduate system. The directions of change have not been spelt out by them, but the UGC has undertaken to do so by suggesting to the universities the introduction of course-credit semester system from next year. However, it would remain a superficial organizational solution, unless it is accompanied by qualitative improvement in academic character.

If the undergraduate programme has to serve as the foundation of higher education a fundamental transformation of the current academic structure is required. The undergraduate programme is a combination of general and specialized education. Its aim, however, has to be redefined to focus on the relationship between the general and specialized in order to achieve interdisciplinarity. The present pattern of rigid compartmentalization which builds insurmountable walls between different disciplines will have to give way to an open system which provides enough space for exposure to the methodology of other disciplines. This would enable students to try out courses of their interest outside the area of specialization. By attributing such openness the undergraduate programme is conceived as a preparation for specialization, with interdisciplinary perspective. It would also aim at a holistic education. The philosophy which informs the new structure is the academic freedom of the teacher and the student. The student would have enough space within the programme to pursue specific interest in order to gain methodological competence for holistic education. At the same time the programme would be so oriented to make use of the intellectual ability and academic expertise of teachers. At present there is a disjunction between the research interest and the teaching responsibilities of teachers.

The discussion about the quality of education is often restricted to curriculum and syllabi. It goes without saying that any educational system worth the name should periodically review and improve them. But the revision of syllabus in itself need not necessarily be academically

productive. Pointing out the limitations of syllabus revision Rabindranath Tagore had cautioned that 'it is only like adding to the bags of wheat the bullock carries to market; it does not make the bullock any the better off'. The contribution of the syllabi to the quality of education depends upon how they are transacted in the class room. At present the university teachers do not receive any training either at the time of entry in the profession or during the course of their career, although academic staff colleges are intended to impart it. University teaching is perhaps the only profession in the world which does not insist on any training. Unless the teachers are well equipped to transact the curriculum, the revision of curriculum and syllabi are unproductive exercises. A majority of teachers do not have the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the advances in their discipline and therefore it would be futile to expect them to handle the revised curriculum and syllabi which incorporate the advances in the discipline. Since universities have ceased to be centres of research teachers have no opportunity to acquaint themselves with emerging research areas and relate them to their teaching. There is hardly a university in India which has a provision for a research professorship. Barring a few universities teachers are not granted sabbatical to pursue research or enrich their knowledge of the discipline. Neither the NKC nor Yashpal Committee report touches upon the need for training the teachers or providing facilities for enriching their academic ability.

The weakness of higher education is not limited to its quality, it equally suffers from organizational inadequacies. Indian universities, barring a few exceptions, follow affiliating system which had its origin in 1857 when the first three universities were set up. There were very few colleges then under the jurisdiction of the universities. Whether desirable or not the universities were able to exercise effective academic control over the colleges and to provide intellectual leadership. Now the number of colleges has become so large that the system is bursting at its seams, with the universities unable even to conduct the examinations. Incidentally that is by and large the main function the universities now discharge. If higher education is to be energized the existing relationship between universities and colleges has to be altered drastically. Two ideas are currently in the air: autonomy and clustering. When the UGC had initially suggested autonomy as a major reform in the system, there was wide spread apprehension that it would lead to concentration of power in the hands of administrators. There are about 300 autonomous colleges in the country today and their functioning goes to prove that

there is substance in this apprehension. Yet, without autonomy to the colleges it may not be possible for the universities to concentrate on their fundamental functions. Nor would it be possible for colleges to make any academic advance. The policy planners and administrators are ceased of the urgency of this issue. But the solutions they offer do not touch the heart of the matter. For instance, the suggestion of NKC and UGC that autonomy be tempered with accountability may not be an adequate prescription. The autonomy can be meaningful only with democratization. If autonomous colleges have not been able to meet the expectations, it is because they do not function within a democratic ambience.

A related reform under discussion is clustering of colleges to share the intellectual and physical resources and to effect the decentralization of powers and functions currently exercised by universities. The clusters could function as autonomous units, forming their curriculum and syllabi, organizing collective teaching and conducting evaluation. At present, given the limitations of the sharing of academic work, the available intellectual resources are not fully utilized. Several teachers do not get a chance to teach what they have specialized, leading to colossal waste of academic energy. The cluster system could remedy this situation by providing opportunities to offer courses open to students of partnering colleges. At the same time to the students it would mean freedom to opt for courses available in partnering institutions. As a result cluster could function as a single academic unit, although constituted by several institutions, which would at the same maintain their independence, both academic and administrative. Drawing the teachers and students into a common pool the cluster system could create an exciting and challenging academic atmosphere and promote a new academic culture. More importantly, cluster system would enable the students to pursue new areas of knowledge. Organizationally over a period of time much of the burden of the universities by way of academic supervision and control and conduct of examination could be born by clusters. As such clusters are conceived not purely as an arrangement for sharing existing resources, but the beginning of an academic arrangement which would provide an alternative, at least partly, to the existing affiliating system.

The improvement in the quality of education requires an all embracing modernization of the system- physical infrastructure, intellectual resources, quality of teachers and pedagogical

practices. It is a gigantic effort for which large scale investment is needed. The XI th Five Year Plan has made a substantial allocation for higher education. From the Xth Plan it marks a nine fold increase. Yet, the Government admits that 'such massive increase in public investment' would not be sufficient to meet even its modest objectives of raising the General Enrolment Ratio to 15% by setting up a few more universities and colleges. It is estimated that the resource gap would be in excess of 2.52 lakh crores. The remedy the Government suggests is public private partnership by 'attracting enlightened and value -based educational entrepreneurship both from within the country and from abroad'. India has a long history of private involvement in education, influenced mainly by philanthropic motives and such efforts have considerably contributed to the development of education. However, unlike in the past, private educational enterprise is now a field of investment for profit. The proliferation of private universities and cross boarder institutions which we witness today are part of foot loose capitalism and neo-liberal policies. It is possibly true that demands of modernization can not be met without private capital, unless the state gives much greater priority to higher education. If private - public partnership is adopted as a remedy, as it appears from the policy documents of the Government, it should be so regulated to prevent unbridled commercialization. The present notion of private- public participation is a prescription for privatization.

In a system of large scale privatization towards which higher education appears to be moving, social justice is likely to be the first casualty. In a class society education is an instrument of power, particularly in current conditions in which knowledge has emerged as a crucial factor of unequal relationship. To those who wield power education is a means to perpetuate it. The entire ideological structure that the private system of education tries to construct contributes to the continuous exclusion of the marginalized. Those who are thus excluded often end up as victims, due to their inability to resolve the contradiction between their aspirations and the reality of their station in life. If an egalitarian society is to be realized, as envisioned in the Constitution, the state has to intervene in a more decisive manner to control the private agencies to ensure a system of education informed by social justice and equity. In fact, they are the core values that education should uphold. That it is not an easy proposition in the prevailing circumstances in the country was proved by the intervention of the judiciary to strike down the initiatives taken by the Government of Kerala.

Given the multi-cultural and multi-religious character of Indian society it is necessary that education should try to imbibe secular values. The secular and moral values are not necessarily distinct and unrelated. A strict division between the two is unreal, not only because they are inter-related in practice but also because most of the moral and ethical values are also embedded in the latter. One of the foundations of secularism, for instance, is humanism which incorporates almost all moral and ethical values derived from religious teachings. Education about religions as repositories of the intellectual ferment in society, distinct from religious education is essential for secularism. Such an approach was suggested by Gandhiji who prescribed that 'a curriculum of religious instruction should include a study of the tenets of faiths other than one's own. For this purpose students should be trained to cultivate the habit of understanding and appreciating the doctrines of great religions of the world in a spirit of reverence and broad minded tolerance'. A secular society can survive only when mutual respect exists among the members of different religious denominations. Among the different agencies which can instill such a consciousness education is perhaps the most important.

From the recent official and popular concerns it appears that higher education – its content, organization and practice- is attracting serious attention. It should lead to modernization of the system, which is secular in content, democratic in practice and interdisciplinary in method. To realize such a system active involvement of teachers, students and enlightened public is essential. Hoping that such an involvement would bring about a qualitative transformation of education I would like to conclude by once again congratulating the graduates for their academic achievement.

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II Date of Birth : 26 April 1936

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V Academic Positions held :

1. Professor of Modern History, Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi – 1983 onwards.
2. Associate Professor, Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 1972 to 1983.
3. Lecturer and Senior Lecturer, Hansraj College, Delhi University, 1965-72.
4. Research Officer, Indian Institute of Public Administration, 1963-65.
5. Lecturer, Department of History, Rajasthan University, 1962-63.

VI Other Positions

1. Vice-Chancellor, Sree Sankaracharya University, Kalady, Kerala.
2. Dean, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.
3. Chairman, Centre for Historical Studies, New Delhi.
4. Vice-Chairman, Kerala Council for Higher Education.
5. Chairman, Kerala Council for Historical Research.
6. Chairman, Archives on Contemporary History, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.
7. Visiting Professor, El Colegio de Mexico, Mexico City.
8. Visiting Professor, Maison de sciences l'homme, Paris.
9. Visiting Fellow, Centre for Modern Oriental Studies, Berlin.
10. Visiting Fellow, British Council, London.
11. Resident Fellow, Rockefeller Study and Research Centre, Bellagio, Italy.
12. President, Modern Indian History Section, Indian History Congress, 1975.
13. General President, Indian History Congress, Sixty Ninth Session, 2008.
14. Chairman, Experts Committee on History, Indira Gandhi Open University, New Delhi.
15. Chairman, Experts Committee on History, National Open School, New Delhi.
16. Chairman, History Panel, International Conference on Kerala Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, 1994.
17. Chairman, Panel on Cultural Processes, International Conference on 500 years of Indo-European Relations, Calicut-Cochin, 1998.
18. Chairman, Committee for Perspective Planning, Jawaharlal Nehru University.
19. Member, Academic Council, Indira Gandhi Open University.
20. Member, Academic Council, Jawaharlal Nehru University.
21. Member, Executive Committee, Jawaharlal Nehru University.
22. Member, Advisory Board, World Book Encyclopedia.
23. Member, Advisory Panel, National Book Trust of India.
24. Member, History Panel, University Grants Commission.
25. Member, Advisory Board, School of Archival Studies, National Archives of India.
26. Member, Advisory Committee, Archives Department, Kerala Government.
27. Member, Advisory Committee, Gazetteers Department, Kerala Government.
28. Member, Task Force on Culture, Ministry of Human Resource Development.

29. Member, Board of Studies, Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum.
30. Member, Board of Studies, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam.
31. Member, Board of Studies, Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra.
32. Member, Board of Studies, Maharshi Dayananda University, Rohtak.
33. Member, Indian Council for Historical Research, New Delhi.
34. Member, Indian Council for Social Science Research, New Delhi.
35. Member, Research Council, National Institute of Science and Technology, New Delhi.
36. Member, Research Council, National Institute of Educational Planners and Administrators, New Delhi.
37. Member, Executive Committee, Nagaland University.
38. Visitor's Nominee, Delhi University.
39. Visitor's Nominee to Allahabad University, Allahabad.
40. Visitor's Nominee to Central University, Nagaland.
41. Visitor's Nominee, Meerut University, Meerut.
42. Visitor's Nominee, Lucknow University, Lucknow.
43. National Lecturer, University Grants Commission.
44. Director, Malayalam Translation Unit, Indian Council for Historical Research.
45. Editor, Studies in History, A Biannual Journal Published by Sage India.
46. Editor, Towards Freedom Project, Indian Council for Historical Research, New Delhi.
47. Consultant, National Institute of Educational Planners and Administrators, New Delhi.
48. Chairman, Review Committee, Indian Institute of Technology, Department of Social Sciences, Chennai.
49. Chairman, UGC Review Committee, Shanti Niketan, 2008.
50. Member, UGC Committee on Reforming Affiliating System, 2008.
51. Chairman, Expert Committee for Reviewing Social Science Text Book, Kerala, 2008.
52. Chairman, Academic Committee, International Conference on Education, Thiruvananthapuram, 2008.

VII Publications

: 23 books and 22 papers.