

Seventh Convocation held on March 11, 1973

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Revered Mr. Chancellor, Respected Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Learned Adhyapakas, Beloved Snatakas and other students, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am free to say- and I say so truthfully- that I fell very happy to be in your midst to day. I regard it a rare privilege to have this opportunity to address this gathering of learned teachers and young students. For this very pleasant assignment I am, indeed, beholden to you, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, and members of your Governing body. My first and foremost duty is to offer my sincere felicitations to the graduates of the year and I proceed to discharge this duty with alacrity and pleasure. Young snatakas, you have just come out of the examination halls and have earned your degrees after successfully completing your respective courses of studies. You have now received the Tilak- the mark of distinctive excellence- imprinted on you foreheads on this the most auspicious day in your lives. I congratulate each and every one of you on your well earned success. I bless you all in the language of an ancient Indian Rishi- (Oh ye of noble mien, live a hundred autumns).

Man of you will now leave the portals of the cloistered sanctuary of this temple of learning to face the battles of life. Go forward and enter the arena of life's struggles with confidence and full faith in your destiny. May God be with you to guide you to success and fame. If this centre of education has been able to impart to you what I conceive to be true learning-which I hope it has done- and if it has equipped you with the qualities, both of the head and the heart, which alone will help you to face the trials, tribulations and struggles of life that lie ahead of you, then it will certainly be entitled to claim credit for having discharged its solemn obligations towards you and will surely, then, deserve well

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of you. From this day onward it should be your earnest endeavour, by your act and conduct, to add further fame to the fair name of this University. Wherever you go and whatever station in life you may happen to occupy, remember, with gratitude, your Alma Mater- the bounteous mother- who has nurtured you up with anxious care and loving solicitude and with whose blessings you are now entering upon your new career. Do not forget or disown your lasting obligations to her .

Yours is a comparatively new University which is fast growing up in state. I have frequently passed along the highway skirting its campus and have had ample opportunities to watch the construction of many new buildings coming up within the university campus. I have been told that the roll strength of students has also been showing a progressively upward curve. I should, however, warn you that the merit and usefulness of a university, like the one before us, cannot be correctly measured merely by the extent of the acreage of its campus, or the architectural beauty and elegance or the number of its hostels, museums, laboratories and other buildings or the number of the students who gather together in it. The true merit of an educational centre is to be judged and determined by the kind and quality of the education imparted by it to the students which, in its turn, depends on the excellence of the selfless services rendered by the adhyapakas to whom are entrusted the sacred task of the educational upbringing and the general welfare of the students and, above all, on the achievements in their respective fields of study alike of the teachers as of the taught. In short a university is known by the quality of its teachers and the meritorious students it produces. The problem, then, is as to how to create that congenial atmosphere which alone can promote and give impetus to the building up of the character of the students who flock to the university in search of learning.

In his very thoughtful and thought provoking essay entitled "Siksha Samashya" Written over 65 years ago Gurudeva Rabindra Nath Tagore discussed this problem in his lucid and inimitable language in great

detail. In that essay he lays strong emphasis on the point that the ideal educational centre must be located in peaceful and serene physical surroundings where the manifestations of Nature will be spontaneous so that the teachers and the taught can see, with their own eyes, the beauty and glory of the changing seasons and feel the pulsation of Nature's joyful moods in their own heart beat. Where externally the presence of Nature can be so felt, the mind of the teachers and the pupils, by a natural process, is bound to blossom out like a flower in its full beauty and fragrance. The congenial atmosphere produced by the external surroundings, just alluded to, will, according to

Gurudeva, help the gurus to be silently engrossed in their devoted for the acquisition of deep and abiding knowledge which, when acquired, will be passed on by them, ungrudgingly, and unreservedly to their disciples. Where the Gurus are constantly engaged in their study the disciples will certainly see learning personified in their respected preceptors and their minds will grow humble and receptive and they will be ready to accept, in full measure, the gift of knowledge from their teachers. The students will be overwhelmed with humility and derive inner strength of character when they will witness the ceaseless striving for acquisition of knowledge by the teachers. Where the teachers unostentatiously give of their best, the students also become capable of accepting that gift completely and usefully. It is, therefore, necessary to provide a serene and peaceful atmosphere in which alone true learning can be acquired and imparted.

It is gratifying to find that the authorities had the foresight to locate your university far away from the crowded and busy life of any very big city and to select the sylvan surrounding of this peaceful countryside. Here the meadows, groves and greens are clad in celestial light. Here the vision of the inhabitants is not obstructed and they can have glimpses of the distant horizon and the snow clad Himalayas which is bound to enkindle in their minds a deep and abiding feeling of the close presence of the infinite Being. The brilliant sunrise, with its invisible fingers, opens out, for the inhabitants, every morning a

gorgeous day and invites them to their daily work with a refreshed body and mind. The glorious sunset paints the evening sky in crimson hues which slowly and silently fade away into the darkness of the night, lulling them into a restful slumber under the canopy of a blue sky studded with myriads of ever wakeful stars and planets. The silent play of the six seasons takes place before their eyes full of wondrous ecstasy. In short, we have here something very much like the kind of physical and external environment visualised by Rabindra Nath as necessary for the natural growth of the minds of young seekers of knowledge in an educational Institutions. The students of this university lane had the rare privilege to live in this beautiful campus and I expect it has refreshed their body and mind and they have taken the fullest advantage of this physical setting in acquiring the true learning. Finally, the fact that the university campus has been named after Raja Ram Mohun Roy, the immortal inaugurator of the modern renaissance is, by itself bound to impress the minds of the inhabitants therein with a sense of sanctity for the place and to inspire them with ardent zeal and robust faith in their hearts.

In the matter of imparting knowledge to young seekers of learning the teachers must necessarily have a vivid realisation of the nobility of their mission. Rabindra Nath in the same essay, just alluded to lamented that in modern times the role of a teacher often tended to, degenerate into that of a vendor of merchandise. The school or college is his shop and a superficial smattering of knowledge is his stock in trade. From a shopkeeper one may expect to buy some articles of daily necessity but in the list of goods dealt in by him one cannot expect such precious commodities as sympathy, affection, regard and other qualities of the heart. A teacher of such a kind and calibre receives his salary as the price for the lessons he sells and there ends his relationship with his customers—the students. But if this very teacher realises that he has ascended the high seat of a noble guru, that he has to vitalise the live of his disciples by that of his own, that he has to kindle the lamp of learning in the heart of his pupils by the undying flame of his own knowledge, that he has to secure the well being of his students, not asserting the

sheer brute force of his superior position and authority but by and through a natural process based on his sympathy, affection and goodwill then only can the teacher attain high distinction and then only can he bestow on his pupils something which is not a mere merchandise but which constitutes a priceless gift. It is only thus that the teacher can qualify himself for receiving the respect and regard of his pupils. The teacher, by force of sheer economic necessity, has to accept a stipend for the sake of his livelihood and to maintain his family but he, nevertheless, makes the performance of his duties honourable and glorious by giving to his pupils more than what he receives.

It has been my great good fortune to receive lessons sitting at the feet of such real gurus in the sylvan surroundings of Santiniketan and I did see learning personified in them. I freely acknowledge my indebtedness to those noble souls who helped in the building up of my life and character. I fervently pray that the young students of this university should have similar opportunities. I hope that the learned teachers of this university will engage themselves, silently and unostentatiously, in a serious study of their respective subjects and pass on the knowledge so acquired by them to their pupils who will receive them with humility in their hearts and deep respect for their teachers. It is my earnest hope that, apart from passing on abstract knowledge to the pupils, the teachers will do something more, that is to say, that the teachers will help in the formation of the character of the students so as to enable them to imbibe true learning. It is only thus that the gurus will be able to claim the respect of the students and clothe themselves with glory.

I wish, at this stage, to explain to you what I mean by true learning. My meaning will be fully explained by four simple Sanskrit words-words of deep meaning and far reaching implications-Uttered by an ancient Indian sage untold centuries ago. I have referred to those words in many of my convocation addresses and I venture to do so again, for I hold that they will bear frequent repetition. Said the Rishi that is learning which sets us free, that is to say, from colossal ignorance and

stupid superstition, from obstinate bigotry and contemptuous intolerance that is learning which liberates us from the vicious grip of insolent arrogance and false pretensions, from supercilious pride and blind prejudices. Said the venerable saint that is learning which gives us freedom, that is to say, from abject fear and moral cowardice, from unabashed selfishness and limitless greed. I repeat -that is learning which sweeps away all traces of ugliness and impurities from our minds and adds beauty, grace, elegance and dignity to life. I say that is true learning which not only stimulates our mental faculties but also builds up our inner strength of character, that instills into our hearts the spirit of self-reliance, service and sacrifice. That, I say, is true learning which enables us to realise and cherish the fatherhood of God and brotherhood of all men and thereby makes full and complete men of us. I hope and trust it will be the earnest endeavour of the teachers of this university to impart this kind of true learning to the students.

It is customary, on such an occasion as the present one, for the person delivering the Convocation address to offer some suitable advice to the snatakas-and the propensity to give gratuitous advice becomes, indeed, very pronounced in one's old age. But somehow or other I have a feeling of diffidence in doing so, for I realise that in this fast changing world I have become what, in common parlance, will be called a back number, an old edition. I have run my race and have now grown old and tired. I am sadly conscious that at this stage of my life I may not claim a free and easy entry into the buoyant spirit of your overflowing youthfulness. I recognise that at my age it is not possible for me to fathom the depth of your feelings or to precisely ascertain the hopes and aspirations that you nurture in your hearts. Nevertheless, I desire to say a few words to you, my young friends, who are about to pass out of the cloistered sanctuary of this university and to enter into the wider fields of life's struggles. Looking at your beaming countenances I feel sure that the pursuit of sordid material gain has not yet blurred the breadth of your vision or warped your minds with the vice of narrow selfishness and greed. I am convinced that the natural impulse of youth, which actuates young men to sacrifice their all, without question or

hesitation, at the alter of lofty ideals, has not become benumbed by any morbid sense of frustration but still throbs in the innermost recesses of your hearts. It is, therefore, to those noble aspirations that are welling up in your hearts that I desire to address my appeal.

Young snatakas, you are stepping out into the world at a difficult but exciting time. Our country is, at the moment, in a great ferment and there is a severe conflict of ideologies. There are, on all sides, signs of disintegration and decay, wanton and senseless violence and ruthless animosity. Men of courage and clear vision are sorely needed at this juncture to stop and clear the present confusion and to give an intelligent lead to the nation. On behalf of the older generation which is fast passing into oblivion I earnestly invite you, my young friends, to the service of our motherland. The turbulent world that awaits you is, no doubt, full of trials and tribulations. You have to meet the challenge of the time. For this purpose you have to carefully and efficiently prepare yourselves as newly recruited soldiers have to undergo a rigorous training before going out to the fighting front. The period of university education is, for you, that preparatory period. Do not permit yourselves to be diverted from this course of preparation. Equip yourselves fully with knowledge so that you can face the future with faith. There is nothing which earnest faith and sincere endeavour cannot achieve. Find inspiration from the maxim — PER ARDUA AD ASTRA. By sincere endeavour and honest labour one may reach the stars this is no larger a mere maxim but is now a demonstrated fact. Therefore concentrate all your efforts to acquiring knowledge and prepare yourselves for life's battles. Your education will equip you to face the future with courage and confidence. Approach all problems objectively and with a rational mind. Do not permit the crystal clear stream of reason to be dried up or to be polluted. Let not unreason guide your actions. Learn to judge every situation with an unbiased mind. Do not be led away by petty shibboleths or false slogans. What is needed is solid work and preparation and not empty words. Platitudes will not carry you anywhere. Remember the saying :- Be humble and eager to accept knowledge from your teachers. Having acquired knowledge take up the service of our motherland in

right earnest. I warn you again that to enter the arena of active politics before being fully equipped for it's as suicidal as the rush of untrained soldiers to the front line. Snatakas, the future is yours. Great are your opportunities and tremendous are the responsibilities that are awaiting you. Noble tasks have yet to be performed and big achievements have yet to be made. If you have profitably availed yourselves of the opportunity to acquire true learning of the kind I have mentioned, you are fully equipped to succeed in your arduous task. By your steadfast devotion and sustained efforts you will help to ameliorate the condition of your less fortunate fellow beings and you will thereby help to make this country great. It is your privilege, young graduates, to help in developing and building up our motherland and enshrine therein the kind of freedom that Gurudev Rabindra Nath Tagore, in his prophetic vision, conceived with all the earnestness of his great and fervent soul. Let us, therefore, supplicate to our Father in Heaven and mingling our voices, however feeble, with the sonorous voice of the poet and the seer, let us pray;—

“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 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.”