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Mr. Chancellor, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, teachers, students, this year's graduates of this university, ladies and gentlemen, I thank this university for asking me to address this convocation and I am particularly happy to be with you in a university which is situated in a part of Bengal well known for its tradition of learning. Varendramandala, one of the twenty-four mandalas of paundra-bhukti which was the ancient name of North Bengal, attained a cultural identity in the Pala-sena period: in our times the intellectual urge of this part of Bengal found its expression in the work of Varendra Anusandhan Samiti which has made an outstanding contribution to an understanding of our civilization. Let us hope that this university will not only keep alive, but further enrich that tradition of learning as a centre of higher teaching and research in our major academic disciplines.

I have chosen to speak on what I consider to be a crisis in education in this country at this historic period in our national history when our ancient civilization is stepping into the modern world. When persons of our age talk about the past they are inclined to exalt it without reservation and disparage whatever is modern . I believe I am free from this rigid traditionalism and I am ready to appreciate many things in what we call our modern civilization. Still I am haunted by a question, a very disturbing question, as I reflect on the state of education today. In my career of over half a century as a university teacher , as a principal of one of our oldest colleges and as a Vice-Chancellor I have met with exceptionally gifted minds and they would be an ornament of any seat of learning in any part of the world. But this does not seem to relieve me of my deep anxiety about the whole system of education of my country today. My question is -what have we done in the forty-three years since our independence to give a new dimension and new depth

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to our education in order to give a new quality to our national life. We have more universities, more colleges, and we are having more and more of them year by year. We have certainly made encouraging, advances in teaching and research in science and technology . And let us be happy about it. But when we reflect on the quality of our intellectual life , on the state of our society, we begin to wonder if this quantitative expansion in our education is matched by any appreciable qualitative improvement. I am afraid we have no notion of such improvement. I think we are yet to define the goals of education or to identify the procedures through which the goals are to be achieved. We are still enslaved by the educational system introduced by our colonial masters with only some inconsequential modifications made necessary by our changed conditions. On the whole our educational system is still based on the ideas embodied in Macualay's Minute of 1835. I do not ignore the value of the New Learning initiated in our country by the labours of men like Raja Rammohun Roy. But we must now begin to realize that as a free nation which is the inheritor of an ancient civilization we must be free to devise a system of education of its own, keeping in view the finest treasures of that civilization .When I say this I am not suggesting any form of cultural revivalism. I am only stressing the need for an awareness of the continuity of our civilization which is not at all inconsistent with the idea of change or modernity. When during the European Renaissance there was a turning back to the Graeco-Roman culture of antiquity it was not a form of revivalism. It was an endeavour to master the past for the enrichment of the present and an enlightened movement towards the future. But are we as much aware of our past in our endeavour to build our future? I think our educated classes are now altogether cut off from their traditions. The end of our political slavery has thrown us into an abject intellectual slavery to the West. It is said that when a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna told him that the Bhagavadgita was a great book the Master smiled and asked who is the Englishman who has said so? This attitude of looking up to the West persists: I am afraid there is now a larger measure of intellectual subservience to the

West today than in the days when we were in political subjection to a western power . Obviously I do not underrate the values of Western civilization. We have gratefully received many things from it and we mean to receive many more things. The New Humanity towards the creation of which we must now begin to work will bring together the civilizations of the East and the West. But we can worthily take from others when we have first realized the necessity of being ourselves. Our most liberal ideas and our urge for universality will have a reality only when we are deeply rooted in our own culture. I think that our university system has failed to create in our younger generation this cultural self-awareness. We are unconsciously promoting what we call fundamentalism when we fail to produce amongst our people an enlightened understanding of the highest spiritual ad moral aspirations of our 5000 year old civilization. I reiterate my conviction that when we value our old civilization I do not encourage any sliding back to the past. I believe in a forward movement; that movement will lose direction if it does not proceed from a strong foundation of values which constitute our culture. Radhakrishnan saw this when he said that our culture was a progressive historical movement still in the making. Its adherents Radhakrishnan added are not the custodians of a deposit, but runners carrying a lighted torch. Let us ask ourselves the very important question -do our universities and colleges give to their students this lighted torch.

This brings me to what I consider to be the gravest deficiency of our educational system. The question is who will give the torch to whom. Our educational institutions have no notion of the encounter between minds which is the essence of any worthy system of education. We are making all kinds of experiments with methods of examination. It appears that our huge educational system is now reduced to a system of conducting examinations, processing results and issuing certificates and diplomas. We have no new thoughts about how to impart instruction. Our students too are concerned with their examinations and their performance in them. The end-product of learning which is the university

degree and which is now nothing more than a licence for a job has become more important than learning itself. After our independence there have been two Education Commissions and their valuable reports are before us. The Radhakrishnan commission appointed in 1949 and the Kothari Commission appointed in 1964 went deep into the whole question of the quality of education our universities are expected to organize and impart. There are a few other Education Committee Reports on the desks of our leaders in education. But there has not been any encouraging change in the system of our education. And what we miss most in it is a relationship between the preceptor and the pupil, a meeting of minds, a happy encounter between the student and his teacher. Let us remember the invocation of the Katha Upanishad: "sa ha navavatu, saha naubhunaktu, saha viryam karavavahai; tejasvinav adhitam astu.; ma vidvisavahai" (May He protect us both, may He be pleased with us both; may we work together with vigour; may our study make us illuminated; may there be no dislike between us.) When I quote these great words I do not indulge in traditionalism. I think these words about an ideal and truly creative relationship between teacher and student should be inscribed on the gate of all our universities as a motto for the entire academic community. This is particularly important when we hear of walk-out of students from examination halls in protest against what they call stiff questions or questions going beyond the prescribed syllabus. And we also hear of teachers, principals and vice-Chancellors being gheraoed by students as a measure for the redress of their grievances. Is true education at all possible in a situation like this ? I know what is mentioned as an obstacle to such intimate contact between teacher and student: the obstacle is said to be the number of students. Our colleges and universities are obliged to cope with what has now become a crowd. But we must find a way of preserving the most vital element in education, close contact between teacher and student, if we mean to give a quality to the instruction we are expected to impart. We must first control the number of entrants. Not all are fit for higher education. There is certainly a need for education for the masses. But at

no stage in human history has there been a system of higher learning for the masses. Higher learning, is bound to be elitistic. Even the most revolutionary of leaders, who have led movements for the amelioration of the condition of the masses have cared for an intellectual elite.

I have in mind Lenin's article entitled Better Fewer, But Better published in Pravda in March 1923 and included in his 50 volume Complete Works. I call it a document of intellectual elitism produced by one of the greatest leaders of the masses in human history . Not all of us can be poets and philosophers, sages and scientists. And we cannot produce such minds for the progress of our civilization unless we succeed in devising a system of education which provides for regular contact between the preceptor and his pupil. Our educational institution must begin to be a community of living individuals, teachers and students coming together in a common pursuit of knowledge.

Another drawback of our present education system is that it encourages acquisition of information as the end of all intellectual labours. The English poet has asked-Where is knowledge lost in information and where is wisdom lost in knowledge. The most informed person is not necessarily a truly educated person. Nor is knowledgeability the only mark of learning. The highest end of education is wisdom, a capacity for innovative thinking, for creative work in a chosen field. Are we encouraging such intellectual activity through our present system of public instruction ? Have we so designed our teaching programme, our syllabus of studies and our style of work in our colleges and universities that our students are naturally inclined to develop a habit of original thinking and a capacity for clear and forceful expression of their thoughts. Let us admit that during the last four decades we have not created such an atmosphere of creative work in our humanities and social sciences. I cannot say anything regarding our achievement in science and technology. But as a layman I have noticed that while one of our scientists received the Nobel Prize in Physics for his researches done in Calcutta before our independence the two Nobel Prize winners of Indian origin received the honour for work done abroad. This is a

very important matter for those who are responsible for the promotion of higher teaching in science and technology. We all know that we spend more on science and technology than on the humanities. This is a world phenomenon. Still it is very important for us to consider the question of doing something significant to give a new direction to our studies in our classical literature, history, philosophy and foreign languages. I know we are now producing a far greater number of Ph. Ds. than ever before. This is certainly a cheering evidence of progress in our academic life. But there is scope for fresh thinking about the quality of researches not only in our universities of the industrially advanced countries of the world. We have now a kind of cosmetic of learning, we are keen on academic trappings which may hide ignorance.

I suppose since I happen to be a Sanskritist, you expect me to say something about the place of our ancient language in our school, collegiate and university education. I confess that I am not at all happy about our attitude to Sanskrit and obviously the role of the subject in our education is determined by that attitude. And that attitude is again influenced by some considerations which I think are not at all important. First we think Sanskrit as a language too difficult to learn. I affirm that it is not at all a difficult language: on the contrary I think that learning a classical language like Sanskrit, Greek or Latin is an intelectual discipline which will help our students in their studies in other disciplines, Secondly, many of us believe that it is a dead language. It is not at all a dead language: it is the language in which is embodied the finest treasures of our civilization and is therefore the very breath of our life. Thirdly it is said that it is a sacred language and for that reason it is the language of the Hindus. I do not have this sacerdotal approach to Sanskrit. I look upon it is a great language, a language which has made a great contribution to human civilization. When in the early Middle Ages Christianity emerged as the religion of Europe Greek and Latin were not discarded as pagan language. On the contrary the two classical languages of Europe provided Christianity with its intellectual foundation. The Early Church Fathers made Plato their master while

the Scholastics of the later Middle Ages found in Aristotle the philosophical foundation of their faith. And let us remember that the New Testament was originally written in Greek, a pagan language. There is really no problem with Sanskrit in a system of secular education when there is no reason to treat as a sacred or hieratic language.

Thirty-two years ago the Government of India appointed a Sanskrit Commission with Professor Suniti Kumar Chatterji as its chairman and its 439-page Report was published in 1958. I was one of those whom the Commission invited for consultation. I was happy to see that the very first recommendation of the Commission was that Sanskrit should have a secure place in the secondary school curriculum 'as a language which all students would be able to take up'. This recommendation has not been taken seriously by those who shape our education policy.

I may also refer to a more recent view of the importance of Sanskrit in our education. I mean the recommendation regarding studies in the language in our schools, colleges and universities in the Report of the Commission for Planning of Higher Education in West Bengal published about six years ago, in April 1984. The Commission recommended that study of Sanskrit should be encouraged and added that knowledge of Sanskrit is important for various branches of learning. I do not know of any significant steps being taken for encouragement of Sanskrit studies in our university system. I think there cannot be any change in the situation unless we realize that Sanskrit will have the importance it deserves only when it is woven into the fabric of our education in the humanities in all its stages.

For those who are passing out and are about to enter the world outside, I have a message. I should like to appeal to them to bring about a radical change in the profoundly unhealthy outlook pervading not merely this country, but also the world at large. Causing division and fragmentation in all spheres, employing agencies terrorising humanity and destroying basic human values. May I urge them to hark back to

the motto of Tagore's University: bhayati viswam ekaanidam and usher in at least the hope of a new universe based on the unifying spirit of love and understanding ?

Before I end I congratulate those who have received their degrees at this convocation and I wish them all success in life.

Thank you.

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