

**Twelfth Convocation held on April 16, 1978****Professor S. K. Mukherjee\***

Mr. Vice- Chancellor, distinguished guests, members of the University Council and of the academic staff and students:

I am fully conscious of the honour you have done me by inviting me to address this convocation. At the outset I must congratulate the recipients of degrees and winners of medals and other academic awards and wish each of them a bright and successful future. I also wish that wherever they might be let them maintain the dignity of their Alma Mater. This wish may appear odd when we notice gradual erosion of values in our academic institutions. This would not have needed to be mentioned in the background of such erosion in other spheres, had it not been for the fact that it is to the academic institutions. That the society looks forward in order to uphold its mores and morals. In a society where education is not available to the majority, the privileged minority has got a greater responsibility in this direction. If this degradation is not stopped we do not know where we will lead ourselves to.

In the management of an academic institution the responsibility has to be shared between the students, teachers the employees and the administrative staff. No one is to be considered less important if we put our faith in and adhere to the philosophy of academic life. When things run normally the problem of sharing responsibilities is not complicated. In times of crisis or when decision has to be taken there is a tendency to avoid responsibility and to create diversionary situations making the problem appear more complicated than what it actually is. Academic considerations are then given a go-by.

The best remedy seems to me to decentralise decision making as far as practicable and to rely on mutual consultations. It is a common experience that we establish associations but fail to take advantage of them to solve our problems. Instead, we make them as forums for ventilating dissensions. When complications arise the ball is sent to somebody else's court and the dissenting parties try to play safe. If to all these are added the complexities arising out of political overtones the confusion is double confounded.

We do realise that a lot of things have to be done in the way of raising standards of teaching and evaluation, rationalising courses of studies, developing new areas of study, making courses more relevant to our needs quickening and streamlining methods and procedures of evaluation, etc., but they cannot be attended to under circumstances which create tension and pressure and are noncongenial to calm and correct deliberations. The principal issue is how to motivate all the constituents of the academic institutions and awaken in them a strong sense of duty and responsibility. Unless this is done the institutions would lose their relevance. Academic institutions constitute an essential prop of the social structure. If this is weakened, development as a whole may be crippled. The sooner we realise this tragic consequence, the easier would it be for us to remedy it. In this task a great responsibility lies with the teachers. They should be at the vanguard of creative innovation, unhampered progress and good performance; they should not only be preceptors but also set good examples. This special role of teachers is unfortunately going by default.

It is contended that unemployment amongst the educated has given rise to the growing apathy towards education, which, by and large, is meant to provide employment. This one-tone correspondence is not generally observed, but the disparity has mounted so high that the young educated can no longer contain their anger and frustration. And in anger they have chosen to strike at the wrong place. The provision for employment is the responsibility of those in charge of developmental

work-the Government and industrial and other concerns. If the rate of development is slow the accumulation of trained personnel is bound to occur. What the University can offer to do is to open new courses of study which are more relevant and may lead to more employment or revise or reject those that are no longer relevant. The University should take note of new developments and act accordingly. In this matter a close relationship between the developmental authorities and industries and the University has to be established.

The delay in publication of results is frustrating to those who are unable to take advantage of current opportunities, for example, competitive examinations etc. There is a large bulk of students whose aspirations and capabilities are not that high, but they also find no suitable jobs, just because there are none. The more they are unable to secure jobs, the more do they try to obtain a higher degree with the vain hope that might entitle them to a job. Frankly speaking, a good number of these students are not of the right calibre to go for higher studies. In order to accommodate them and pass them the standards get diluted and unfortunately perhaps, malpractices become order of the day. At a certain predegree stage bulk of the young people should be absorbed in some kind of productive jobs and diverted out of the field of higher education. This step should not be construed as an aspersion on any category of students or an attempt to stifle expansion of higher education or its denial. On the other hand, it is aimed at upgrading the quality of higher education with the help of such category of students as are capable of receiving higher education and being benefited by it. A greater amount of social benefit accrues thereby, justifying this step. Those who go for jobs at an early stage should have adequate scope for improving their knowledge and efficiency. For this purpose the academic institutions should offer relevant courses of study, but not necessarily for awarding degress.

An impression has been created amongst the students and also the public that the passing of an examination is an act of luck and needs

little preparation. Uncertainty factors are no doubt operative, which arise out of the very nature of questions, and the subjectivity of assessment that go with them. One of the ways these defects may be remedied is by taking recourse to objective questions covering a wide range of topics rather than the usual essay type of questions on narrow and specialised topics. The changeover has yielded better results and is worth trial. However, teachers and students have both to be fully acquainted with the changeover not only in theory but also in practice. The idea of question banks is in consonance with this proposal.

We have entertained the thesis that if jobs are made available for those having ten or twelve years of schooling, and those who are not academically suitable for higher studies, it will be possible to raise the standards of the latter. But the question of jobs looms large. Recently, attention has rightly been directed to the development of rural areas. It is hoped that this trend is not a mere cliché. Admittedly, the rural sector is so much neglected that there is ample scope of its development, and hence of employment opportunities. Depending on resource potential and on the degree of development the personnel required for rural development may vary from the highly qualified to ordinary craftsmen. Although agriculture is the predominant occupation in the rural areas, there exist possibilities for developing Industries supplying needs of agriculture and those based on it.

This would in the long term persuade the rural population to stay in the villages and help improve their economy. The inputs required for this venture are education, science & technology and socio-economic awareness, each of which should open up fresh avenues for employment. What the academic institutions and Universities situated in the urban areas should do in this context is to revise some of the courses of study and introduce new ones, which would equip the students for effective participation in the development programme in terms of skill and know-how as well as of attitude and motivation. The most important instrument to carry out this task are the teachers. Unless the latter are

themselves motivated and equipped with the required knowledge, no headway would be possible. Hence, the motivation and training of teachers in the new ventures are considered a high priority. The relevance of education is judged by its usefulness, insofar as it has helped in the upliftment of the nation- materially and morally. An educational plan has to be complementary to the nation's overall plan so that the trained human resources are considered an asset, rather than a liability. The task before the academic institutions is an uphill one and all those who belong there have a responsibility to share not only in thwarting away the undesirable influence of politicisation and groupism and selfish motives, but also in bringing back sense and sanity, dignity and dedication and peace and purposiveness in the academic sphere in particular and in the society in general.

#### 16.4.78