

# UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

## FIFTEENTH ANNUAL CONVOCATION



**ADDRESS**

by

**SHRI T. N. SINGH**  
**CHANCELLOR, NORTH BENGAL UNIVERSITY**

**RAJA RAMMOHUNPUR**  
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## CHANCELLOR'S ADDRESS

Once in a year I have occasion to address the alumni and the students of this great seat of learning. I welcome such an opportunity as on such occasions I can take you into confidence about my thinking on the educational problems of our State in particular and of the country in general. For a balanced view of things it is not desirable to isolate the educational problems of a single state from similar or greater problems in other parts of our country.

About sixty years ago, on the call of Gandhiji I along with many of my class-fellows, including the late Lal Bahadur Shastri, gave up our studies in a British Government aided School to join the non-cooperation movement. Simultaneously, Gandhiji founded the Kashi Vidyapith in 1921. While doing so he gave us a general idea of his concept of what the Indian educational system should be. Even after the passage of six decades, I feel, his views on national education are as valid today as they were then. When he asked us to give up our studies in the schools and colleges of those days run through Government assistance or by Government he did not want us to give up our studies and take to politics completely. His main objection was to the system of education which, according to him denationalised us and specialised in creating low-paid clerks. Therefore, he advocated boycott of Government aided educational institutions. At the same time he insisted that even after joining the non-cooperation movement, we should carry on our studies in some of the national institutions which he had founded in a systematic way. So though boycott of the educational institutions was a part of the non-cooperation movement of 1921-22, I was surprised to find that in Kashi Vidyapith there was hardly any room for politics as such. We were serious students and devoted ourselves with single-mindedness to our studies.

Some of the things that Gandhiji did then appear to be contradictory today but in my view the so-called contradictions are only apparent in most cases. For instance, though he urged us to join his movement and court imprisonment, he also simultaneously reiterated that when we were released from our prisons and if the movement was called off, we should continue our studies in the national institutions started by him as before. As a matter of fact in 1921-22 he had asked us to give up our studies for one year only.

In other words, he did not like us to be part-time political workers and part-time students. Thus while Gandhiji sought co-operation and involvement of the youth in his struggle for freedom he insisted that the students of the National Colleges established by him should carry on their studies. It was only after we had become graduates or Shastris of the Kashi Vidyapith that we joined politics as whole timers or even on part-time basis depending on our economic conditions. The question therefore to be asked today is whether students while carrying on their studies can also simultaneously indulge in the game of politics on a part-time basis.

This question is somewhat difficult to answer as the needs of country's situation differ from time to time. My Acharya, the late Dr. Bhagwan Das used to say there are always two sides of a question. We should never be dogmatic and assert that this only is true. Rather, we should say this also is true. He emphasised that in order to learn the totality of truth we should understand the difference between the meanings of "only" and "also". "Only" stands for dogmatism and "also" for tolerance, the latter in his opinion being a correct interpretation of truth or "Satya". We have therefore to examine to what extent and under what conditions politicalisation in our educational institutions vis-a-vis students and even teachers should be permissible. I am inclined to agree with the view which was held by many of us in 1920's that if students wish to indulge in political activities they should temporarily give up their studies. But when they rejoin educational institutions they should, as far as possible, devote themselves to their studies single-mindedly.

Probably what I am saying may not be acceptable to many today. It may even be considered out-dated by some. But, is it really necessary that while being a student one should be a part-time student and also a part-time politician? Real pursuit of one's studies demands maximum amount of his or her time and attention for the purpose. Therefore, I agree with the *madhyam marg*, the middle path shown by Gandhiji that so long as one studies one should devote himself to it with single-minded purpose. But if he has a desire to take to politics he should give up his education temporarily and then rejoin his studies if possible. But mixing up of the two things simultaneously on a part-time basis by students may lead to irreconcilable and contradictory positions.

After having expressed my general agreement with what Gandhiji taught us in 1920's when he called upon the students to join his political movement, the question is in today's context what should be the correct attitude to take for the students educational institutions, guardians and the Government. I have watched with some dismay and a certain amount of misgiving the attitude of political parties regarding involvement of students in their political confrontations and it is alleged that for their own purposes they are allowing them to continue their studies somewhat half-heartedly. If one wants to get the advantages of real education he has to devote himself whole-heartedly to his studies. Part-time politics and part-time studies simultaneously will be like riding on two boats, which is fraught with serious consequences. I do not claim that whatever I have said

above is the only correct view. There must be other side of the case also. Yet in view of the general situation of conflicts and confrontations prevailing in most of our educational institutions and their politicalisation through warring groups and parties among the students and teachers, I think the time has come for politicians and educationists alike to give serious thought to this problem. As a matter of fact, it may be desirable to hold serious discussions in which scholars, politicians, guardians and teachers can join and perhaps, after an exchange of views on this subject for a period, a concensus on the correct path to be followed may emerge.

Whatever that may be, the present excuses or justification of politicalisation of our educational institutions and inroads by political parties affect the healthy atmosphere of our temples of learning and lead to groupism and factionalism among students and teachers and might generally be considered objectionable from many points of view. In our State the situation in some of the Universities is not what one would like it to be. One may even tolerate factionalism and groupism among teachers and students so long as they do not affect the peaceful acquisition of knowledge by our educated young men and the high regard and status which our education institutions have enjoyed in Indian society for several decades. Probably a solution of this problem may be found in what Gandhiji advised us many, many decades ago namely, if a young student wants to serve a certain political objective he should take to that whole-heartedly even though it may mean giving up one's studies. But there should be no objection if they want to return to their studies after an interval and then they must give up all politics.

If I am permitted to speak out my mind freely may I say that perhaps for some people politics has become a career whereas when the struggle for freedom began early in the twentieth century, politics was a path of sacrifice and suffering. So the situation so far as politics is concerned widely differs. But those who do not wish to choose politics as a career and their number is bound to be very large, should not involve themselves in politics and should have all facilities and opportunities to pursue their studies undisturbed.

Many people have criticised the present-day educational system that it does not equip our young man with aptitudes to face the economic struggle in life. That is a question in regard to which many solutions have been offered and many experiments tried. I do not intend to deal with them here. It is a big subject and should better be left to specialists in the subject. I would however, like to draw attention to one important factor. The question is whether the planned economic development that has been taking place for the last three decades, is capable of responding to the needs and aspirations of an ever increasing number of young men swelling every year the ranks of educated unemployed. Year after year there is a growing back-log of unemployed. Is this fact not enough to prove that whatever developmental programmes have been taken in hand so far, have not been able to absorb the growing number of educated young men clamouring for employment? I have earlier referred to the problems of unemployables coming out of our educational institutions and I am sure education reformists are studying that

problem. Yet the fact cannot be ignored that planning has not created the expected quantum of employment opportunities. Surely, one of the principal objectives of the development programmes should be to provide increasing opportunities to the younger generation for productive work. In view of the growing unemployment problem, is it also not desirable that besides examining the appropriateness of our educational system whether in the technical, vocational or general education fields, attention should be focussed on the question whether the benefits of our plan expenditure have largely flowed only to the selected few instead of being evenly spread out. Some say that there has been concentration of wealth in a few hands, others say that the benefits of the plan expenditure do not reach a very large number of people below the poverty line. Whatever may be the truth, it is desirable that we should also have a re-thinking as to what can be done to modify our developmental strategy to absorb larger numbers of our youngmen offering themselves for employment every year so that the back-log of the unemployed decreases and we march towards the goal of full employment and a better deal for the younger generation in a systematic manner and in a reasonable period of time.

I have tried to place these two important aspects of the problems of our youngmen vis-a-vis the needs of our society. I would not like to be dogmatic, in the words of my late teacher Dr. Bhagwan Das, in regard to the solutions that can be offered. What I have said is intended more to start a fruitful discussion on these aspects instead of putting forth my own alternative proposal. I am the ex-officio Chancellor of this and other Universities as I happen to be Governor. It is therefore incumbent on me to avoid being involved in controversies as far possible. But occasionally a Governor even should be permitted to air his views on matters connected with education and the future of the younger generation in as non-controversial a manner as possible. I hope the views expressed here will be taken in the spirit they are made.

I wish the best of luck to the students and the alumni of this University who have obtained their Doctorates and Degrees and I congratulate them. I wish the rest better luck next time.

Before concluding I would call upon our young students and teachers who, according to our ancient tradition of education, are members of one united family, to show the way for ushering in a new era of hopes and fulfilment in the educational history of our country.