

Shaping the Future

Chancellor' Address at the 4th Convocation of Ravenshaw University, Cuttack on 16.04. 2011

Today, I am happy to preside over the fourth Convocation of Ravenshaw University. Convocation is indeed an occasion which is both joyous and solemn. It represents a major milestone in the careers of the students and also for the university on its onward march to achieve excellence. As the Chancellor of this university, I am extremely glad to welcome our Chief Guest, Padma Vibhusan Dr. Montek Singh Ahluwaliaji, Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission of India and confer the Honorary Degree of Doctorate of Science on him. The university and students in particular are elated to have such a distinguished personality and erudite scholar who is termed as one of the architects of India's breathtaking economic transformation. Dr. Ahluwaliaji, I feel needs no introduction at this august scholastic gathering and that too when India is experiencing higher growth rate. An alumnus of Oxford University, Dr. Ahluwaliaji has served in key posts in Government of India and World Bank and that too with great distinction and honour. With our beloved Prime Minister who himself an economist par excellence at the helm of economic affairs Dr. Ahluwaliaji as Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission of India will leave no stone unturned to help us achieve 10 percent GDP growth in next decade and drive India on the path of becoming a developed country. He always emphasizes that the true objective for India is inclusive growth, an equitable and constructive distribution of economic gains. It is a delight not only for me but for all present here to listen to his learned address where he presented a true and promising picture of rising Indian economy, emergence of India on the world stage as a global economic power and where we need to focus more. I am sure students who will be leading the country in future and the faculty have gained meaningfully from his address and raise themselves to the occasion as Dr. Ahluwaliaji expects from them in building an India of their dream.

Ravenshaw University is continuing its noble tradition of conferring honorary Doctorate degree on eminent persons from different walks of life on its convocation. The University is proud and honoured today to confer this prestigious degree on eight distinguished persons. I have great pleasure in conferring the degree on them on behalf of this University. I congratulate all of them for setting such high standard in their respective profession and I am sure they will continue to do so and serve the society in their own way which others would emulate. They all are shining examples to the young students present here. I would advise the students to learn from the dedication, scholarly pursuit and the will to succeed exhibited by these eminent personalities and try to emulate in their working life and habits.

My wholehearted congratulations to students who have received degrees and won awards and prizes on successful completion of their academic programmes. Their achievements have made all of us proud. It is the result of their hard work and strong determination. I know time, effort and dedication that is required to obtain such a prestigious academic qualification. On this occasion, I share their joy and happiness. I am sure when our young men and women are stepping out of the portals of the university they must have a dream, a dream that will make you proud of yourself, make your parents, teachers, friends and above all, all of us proud. When that dream gets realized, it will help the nation in moving forward fulfilling its dream. Because I know the time our young men and women have spent here and teaching they have received here in this Ravenshaw University having the legacy of a sacred learning institution must have imbibed in them to think of country first and an individual comes next. Our students have shown tremendous promise and I am confident they will continue scholastic pursuit with same spirit and believe in hard work to crown with more success in future and make the alma mater proud of them.

Convocation provides an opportunity for self-introspection to an individual and the institution alike. Convocations of our Universities are meant to build the spirit of partnership in scholarship, and for optimizing fruits of learning; occasions to assess,

what further material resources and technologies need to be transferred to our institutions, and how societies and civilizations around the world could build greater congeniality in our world. We thus prepare societies for reconciling globalizing instincts with localizing impulses. It is imperative that the higher education in all possible modes namely, conventional, open, distance or self-financing learning systems join together to foster complementary academic accomplishments without in any way compromising any aspects of maintaining quality.

Given the searching necessity of convocation to ponder over the issues relating to the import of education, universities, empowerment of students and civil society, it may be worthwhile to engage with the above issues with certain perspective.

Our universities are supposed to be temples of knowledge and produce great minds that are expected to shape the future of our country. These temples of knowledge should not be allowed to become, as a noted American philosopher Herbert Marcuse put it, centres of acknowledgement. These universities should be centres of cognition, not of recognition. Our educational institutions are, however, often noticed to be becoming not only centres of acknowledgement, instead of that of knowledge; they are also unfortunately producing one dimensional persons.

The education system should never be made subservient to powerful interests. If an education system is made to serve some interests, humanity and human values will be in serious danger. Education system should only serve values, values of justice, liberty, equality, fraternity, peace and compassion. The human values can bloom only in the absence of injustice, violence and clash of interests.

Universities should produce thinking liberal minds, minds, which would dedicate themselves to fight narrow sectarianism. We need minds which are ever active in quest for truth and sensitive to others' suffering. In other words, this could be a mind which will encourage dissent and which will accept the otherness of the other and explore this otherness with keen interest.

A vibrant civil society cannot come into existence without critical approach. No meaningful progress is possible with blind submission to the authority. All great reformers have always subverted status quo and created new society, a new human person. A thinking mind will always strive to bring about change. Change is the law and dynamics of life. A creative mind always thinks afresh and remains engaged with the process of change.

Education is not knowledge alone, but also the capacity to utilize it. The quality of education depends on the ability it imparts to make proper use of learning. In other words, acquiring knowledge coupled with the ability for its proper application is the real education.

The purpose of education is to produce knowledge makers with the capacity of making the most profitable use of their acquired knowledge. Spelling out the objective and true functions of the University in the life of a nation, in his convocation address given at the University of Calcutta in 1922, Sir Asutosh Mookerji, had observed: "To my mind the University is a great storehouse of learning, a great bureau of standards, a great workshop of knowledge, a great laboratory for the training as well of men of thoughts as of men of action. The university is thus the instrument of the state for the conservation of knowledge, for the discovery of knowledge, for the distribution of knowledge, and above all, for the creation of knowledge-makers."

Sir Asutosh was far ahead of his times and his vision is, indeed, striking. It is only now that we have started saying that the 21st century is going to be the century of knowledge; and that the intellectual capital of a nation, its true asset and the index of its development, would determine its level of development and ranking in the world.

In the context of mapping the nature of education for the twenty-first century, it has been appropriately emphasized that any desirable education system can seek its foundational legitimacy by linking itself to the creation of a more equitable, fairer and more livable world in the twenty-first century. This can happen only when we become more caring and humane. The need is for each one of us to imbibe the trait of fairness and to adopt a sense of justice as our way of life. Today, education must fulfill the realization of

the needs and ideals of the society. Government must transform itself into an agency of society from its role as an instrument of power. National institutions must catalyze the process of social change.

The objectives mentioned in the preamble to the Constitution have to be achieved and the education system must be geared to accelerate the social change into a Welfare State assuring distributive justice envisaged in the directive principles. The guaranteed fundamental rights would be honoured only with this effort of the state coupled with performance of fundamental duties which indicates the focus on ethical values, which form a significant part of the Indian ethos.

True education required operationalisation of fundamental duties so that full human resource development is achieved and the nation's richest asset is augmented. Thus imparting ethical values as a significant constituent of education is no longer merely persuasive but a constitutional imperative. It being essential for development and for realization of full potential of the human person, its significance need hardly be emphasized.

Nation building is a process by which emotional integration of the people is achieved. The emotional integration can be achieved and sustained on a strong ethical, legal and material foundation, which can assure dignity of the individual, equality and equal opportunity for development of all the people. The objective of Fraternity specified in the Preamble can be achieved only when every citizen performs his duty to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India. Only conscious and ethical people can preserve freedom and democracy, and free the society from imbalance and injustice. This is the constitutional premise. The aim of education must be to prepare each individual for this task.

The significance of ethics as a constituent of education cannot be overemphasized. It is necessary not merely to achieve personal excellence, but also to enable the nation to rise to higher levels of endeavor and achievement. Our achievements are laudable, and they could have been more, but for the decadence in public morality. There is a crisis of

character. This must be changed for the better by infusion of morality in private and public life. All education must, therefore, be ethics oriented to equip our future nation builders for the greater task.

I am quite confident that the recommendations of the Task Force of Government of Orissa on higher education would help chart out a viable roadmap for higher education in Orissa in which the concerns for the above larger theoretical issues relating to university education can meaningfully be reflected and addressed. The three-fold exercise in terms of restoration, expansion, and consolidation of higher education as has been emphasized by the Task Force needs to be progressively weighed and evaluated in terms of their implications for the 'poorest of the poor' and other such associated politico-ethical issues.

The revamping of university education system through creation of research centres, strengthening of quality initiatives, expansion of technology enabled learning and structuring of autonomous governance are indeed commendable recommendations by the Task Force. However, such initiatives can only gain moral legitimacy when appropriate mechanisms are developed to ensure optimisation of human interests.

I had in fact stressed on the need for re-orienting our approach to meet the challenges and solve the problems without compromising the humanistic goal on which the concept of university is based in my convocation address to Ravenshaw in 2009. I had wished also then that Ravenshaw would soon emerge as nodal centre of innovative learning and wisdom and more importantly as a catalyst for correction of social errors.

The way Ravenshaw has engaged with the task of transforming it into a university both in form and content over the last half a decade has really appeared 'perplexing' perhaps because of its inventive ideological underpinnings with which it has sought to redefine itself. The physical as well as the conceptual space of the university has been critically restructured with a view to help carve Ravenshaw its new identity. The Ravenshaw faculty, it has been rightly observed so, represents a pool of 'ignited minds' who often seek to question meta narratives. In fact, my idea and dream of Ravenshaw centering as a 'hub of innovative learning and wisdom' and also as a prime mover for

correcting social errors and aberrations assume a sense of fulfillment from the above fact. This makes me further visualize a potentially endowed intellectual leadership from Ravenshaw that can truly partner other appropriate social forces and agencies to redefine the discourse of 'inclusive development with a humane face' for Orissa as it today seeks to negotiate with the challenges of 'globalisation'.

Beyond faculty, it is the empowered student community of Ravenshaw and the Ravenshavians in particular who are expected to intervene decisively in translating this concept into a living reality of broad based transparent movement. It is only then that my fond hope and cherished dream of universities becoming agencies for bringing smiles to the poor and empowering human beings with wholesomeness can be tuned with the music of eternal joy. The history of Ravenshaw has always been viewed most appropriately as the history of modern Orissa. With the realization of above dream, however, we can proudly rephrase this popular saying as the (future) history of Ravenshaw as the history of post-post colonial Orissa.

The youth are the strength, future and dream of a nation. India has the highest youth population with 55% of population below the age of 25. With this human wealth India will march ahead of other countries economically and socially. India will be a fine mix of human resource development and economic development. Human resource development should precede economic development. We will wipe off poverty from the beautiful face of India. India will continue to be the largest and the strongest democracy in the world with its multi lingual, multi religious, multi ethnic and multi cultural identity.

Today we live in a world of human rights where all human beings are born free and equal in dignity. We live in a knowledge society in which brain power and not physical power counts. Nature has corrected its biological imbalance. Men may be physically superior to women. But in brain power women are equal and even superior to men as more toppers and gold medalists are girls. In Ravenshaw University also 3978 are girls and 2781 are boys.

With these words, I have great pleasure to be on this joyous occasion. I wish the students very bright future and Ravenshaw University all success in its endeavours to glorify its days and attain great heights in days ahead.

Vande Utkal Janani

Jai Hind.