

Priorities and Perspectives of Higher Education

Chancellor's Address on the Occasion of the Twenty-fourth Convocation of Sambalpur University, Burla on 24.02 2011

It gives me immense pleasure to be with you in the sylvan surroundings of Sambalpur University on the august occasion of its 24th Convocation. The impressive ceremonial aura of the event and the spirited ambience, which it creates, symbolically indicate the strides Sambalpur University is making towards its cherished goals of service to the society through a careful nurture and development of human resource in its entirety: mind, morals and feelings. Sambalpur University is indeed proud today to have Dr. D. Subbaraoji, Governor of the Reserve Bank of India as Chief Guest on this impressive academic ceremony. As the Chancellor of the University, I have great pleasure in extending him a very hearty welcome to this august occasion. A brilliant scholar and an alumnus of IIT, Kanpur, Dr. Subbaraoji has held several key positions in the country and outside like Finance Secretary in the Ministry of Finance and lead economist in the World Bank on a very successful career. As the 22nd Governor of the Reserve Bank of India he has been highly impressive. He has also written extensively on issues in public finance, decentralization and political economy of reforms. His just delivered lecture reflects his vision and I am sure students must have found his lecture very enlightening and it will provide them with right kind of attitude to ride high and make country proud of them.

Convocation is not only an important event for the university but also one of the most memorable occasions in the academic life of the students. It is on this day that the students find years of intensive study and hard work getting rewarded as they receive degrees and medals to feel happy and make their parents, teachers, family members and well wishers proud. I take this opportunity to congratulate the students who are graduating today on their

well-deserved academic attainments and wish them the very best in their professional fields and call upon them to work for the uplift of their nation and welfare of humanity at large with utmost dedication. I am sure the education and training they have received in this centre of higher learning will help them stand in good stead to face the challenges of life.

It is heartening that Sambalpur University has come a fairly long way during a span of a little over four decades; having grown into an institution with over two hundred affiliated colleges spread over 10 districts of Orissa. Twenty Post-Graduate departments on the Jyoti Vihar Campus have been offering thirty-two courses. I note with happiness that many of these departments in Humanities and Sciences have been acclaimed nationally to run DRS and DSA programmes, and with an inter-disciplinary thrust the departments have been restructured into various Schools of Studies.

In contemporary times the imperatives of neo-liberal global economy have influenced the priorities and perspectives of higher education in India in startlingly new ways. While others are trailing behind, India has been marching ahead towards prosperity. It is now one among the fastest growing economies of the world, and for this reason the needs for better infrastructure have been felt more than ever before to sustain the present rate of economic growth through greater industrial and agricultural output. Despite its rise as an economic power India occupies the 119th position in the Human Development Index (HDI) out of a total of 169 countries listed in the UNDP report of 2010. Between 1980 and 2010, India's Human Development Index has increased very slowly at the rate of 1.6 percent only. Embarrassingly enough, it occupies 122nd position out of 128 countries in the Gender Inequality Index. Although literacy is a critical input of development, 34 percent of the world's illiterate people live in this country. To balance economic growth with social justice, and to work out schemes for inclusive growth what needs to be emphasized is greater investment in higher education together with wide ranging reforms in this sector at all levels. The spending in the higher

education sector in India which constitutes only 0.7 percent of the GDP needs to be at least doubled. However, to set to grow faster, the Higher Education sector has received Rs.1,400 crore more than in the 2009-10 fiscal year with a total allocation of Rs.11,000 crore for the sector, around seven percent more than in 2009-10. Now UGC proposes to fund setting of 374 model colleges all over the country.

As for reforms, the Ministry of Human Resource Development has been taking many bold steps through legislation. The National Commission for Higher Education and Research Bill aims at developing a system of higher education with quality and cutting-edge to meet challenges of global competitiveness. It will facilitate the entry of foreign universities in the Indian academic market and encourage institutions of higher education to go for autonomy for the free pursuit of knowledge and innovation, and for facilitating access, inclusion and opportunities to all, and providing for comprehensive and holistic growth of higher education and research in a competitive global environment, through reforms and renovation. A new regimen of accreditation by National Accreditation Regulatory Authority for Higher Educational Institutions Act will also come into force, making National Board of Accreditation and Assessment Council to operate under the National Accreditation Regulatory Authority. In addition, a proposal has been made to grade the teaching and research standard of the teachers. Once put into effect, the entire process of assessment will be rigorous and it will urge the educational institutions prepare themselves for competition with private and foreign universities. In addition, the Educational Tribunal Bill, seeking to set up specialised tribunals at the Centre and the states for adjudicating matters relating to disputes in educational institutions, Prohibition of Unfair Practices in Technical, Medical Educational Institutions and Universities Bill are some of the progressive legislative measures to overhaul the entire academic set up. In this context, I understand that Sambalpur University is preparing itself for a fresh round of assessment by NAAC. It is indeed a positive step on the part of the University to claim larger funding from the government agencies on the basis of its merit and also take it

as a challenge to improve its academic profile further.

It is high time this institution braced itself to face the new challenges that are likely to come in the future. Problems of resource crunch and shortage of staff do sometimes stand in the way of achieving the goals, but fiscal prudence and discipline as well as cost-effective out-sourcing can solve these problems. The University must sincerely follow up the recommendations of the internal academic and administrative audit bodies and seriously work towards reforms from within in good earnest. We have to adapt to the changing circumstances around us with an open and positive mindset. The present times demand greater responsibility, accountability, all-round skills, managerial efficiency, open-mindedness and above all professionalism in all sectors, whether academic or otherwise. So, one ought to live according to the dictates of the present time or be simply left out to one's own peril. The University ought to not only work out a stringent mechanism to deal appropriately with incidence of insincerity and poor performance in academic and administrative sectors, but also develop a system of incentive-giving to encourage the academic and non-academic work force whose performance level is above satisfactory.

We are now in a digital world where everything is governed by technological advancements. We need more technical brains to help the country forge ahead in the era of technology. Along with this, our arts, science and commerce streams continue to hold relevance as there is a plethora of job opportunities in social, media, banking and other sectors and more importantly in teaching and law profession. There is every need to revamp the curricula to the requirements of time. I consider that it is a welcome step on the part of Sambalpur University to offer Self-financing Courses to generate resources and overcome to some extent the resource crunch. I am also happy that the University has launched new M. Tech. courses in Environmental Science and Engineering and Food Science and Technology, and Master level courses in Insurance and Risk Management, Finance and Control and Social

Work in the last few years. All these courses seem to be well-timed and in tune with the changing trends in higher education that are geared to the technology-intensive and market oriented global culture. At the same time, the University has done commendable job in offering courses in Liberal Arts and Humanities, namely Hindi Language and Literature, Performing Arts, Post Graduation Diploma in Translation Studies etc. This is certainly indicative of the growth of education in all its aspects to which this institution stands committed.

I am also equally happy that Sambalpur University Institute of Information Technology has been established as an autonomous constituent institute of the University along the line of IITs to impart education relating to Information Technology and allied subjects. That this institution stresses a holistic model of education in science and technology is evident from its teaching programme that contains components of Humanities and Social Sciences. I am sure, it will go a long way in nurturing the young minds in the contemporary globalised environment where the demand is for innovation, research and technical skill of international standard.

I wish to remind the graduating students that Orissa, which is culturally the richest State and well-endowed with mineral resources, has not yet achieved the desired progress and development. Poverty and illiteracy are the biggest hurdles on its path; I term these as two ugly spots on the beautiful face of Orissa. We have to remove these two spots. I often say – poverty leads to illiteracy but literacy drives away poverty. To enhance the literacy rate particularly among the tribal and to reduce high drop out rates among the girls, I have launched a literacy drive programme “Gyanalok” in the state involving the NSS students of College and University. The response has been highly encouraging and Sambalpur University has its own contribution to the success of this programme. I wish that our young students should participate in larger numbers to make Orissa a fully literate state. The young scholars

and scientists must bear in mind that a vast majority of people live in a state of abject poverty and deprivation and desperately cry for food, basic education and healthcare. Towards these teeming millions of people they have moral obligations and social responsibilities of dedicated service, so that the suffering of the poor can be mitigated. In this regard, I would like our young men and women to remember the words of Gandhiji who said, “We must become the change we want to see.” While serving humanity our students should learn humility and be on their guard against snobbery that education often breeds. They must also remember that the foundation of the nation depends on strong moral character and ethical principles of its citizens.

I want our young minds to be as much fortified with knowledge as nurtured with morals and humanist ideals to fight poverty, ignorance and all other social evils. They should remember what the great humanist Hannah Arendt had said: “Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token to save it from that ruin, which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and the young, would be inevitable”.

I congratulate the graduating scholars once again and wish them a very bright future. I thank the Vice-Chancellor and his team who have worked with dedication to make this Convocation such a grand success. Lastly, I wish Sambalpur University to attain further heights of glory in days ahead with everyone’s cooperation, participation and involvement.

Jai Hind.