

Centres of Learning

Address at the Inaugural Session of the Annual Conference of Vice-Chancellors at Raj Bhavan, Bhubaneswar on 29.07.11

I feel happy to extend a hearty welcome to all of you to this Annual Conference of Vice-Chancellors. It is my pleasure to welcome Hon'ble Ministers of Agriculture, Culture and Higher Education who are attending the conference for the first time. Similarly, we have five new Vice-Chancellors since last Conference in May last year. I also welcome them to this Conference. Over these years, this Conference of Vice-Chancellors has evolved into a wider and bigger platform for exhaustive deliberations and exchange of views and ideas on various matters concerning good administration and quality education in our universities. The Conference has given us opportunity not only to take stock of our progress but also to take right decisions and even arrive at consensus on critical matters. Beside this, I have been holding meetings regularly with Vice-Chancellors separately and discussing with them on various matters of importance and in the process updating myself directly with the developments in all the universities. It is my observation that this Conference is of paramount importance to take upward strides and simultaneously to consolidate the roots, I mean the very purpose behind the establishment of university.

Here, I am reminded of the words of our first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru who had rightly said, "All is well with a nation, if its universities are in good shape and functional." These words signify the importance of universities in the development and growth of a nation. In India universities are playing an outstanding job of producing enlightened citizens for the nation. It is good to see massive transformation and reforms now taking place in the sphere of higher and university education and it is so because of the emphasis given by the Government. We now have more number of universities and even there is plan to increase the number in near future. If we take the case of our State the number has increased in recent

time, some are state controlled and others controlled by the Centre. We have various kinds of university from traditional learning to modern learning and also separate specialized universities. They all are catering to the educational needs of the youths of our state. Orissa is fast emerging as prime Education hub in the country. It is definitely a very healthy development but at the same time we need to constantly focus on imparting quality education both in terms of exposure to knowledge and inculcation of sound skills to our students.

While we feel proud of our students passing from our institutions and universities and are doing very well worldwide, we at the same time face shortage of employable manpower in most areas. Our students are found wanting and this is very unfortunate. It means we need to analyze and strengthen our system of developing human resources. Today opportunities are coming in big way from manufacturing sector to service sectors. The biggest challenge before us is to equip our students with employable talent and skill to take advantage of these opportunities. I feel that industry-academia collaboration is very important to the development of human resource. Our universities should be more sensible on the matter and invite industries and corporate houses to equip our young men and women with modern knowledge, skills and techniques and enhance their productive capacity. There has to be more involvement of industry if we have to convert our large youth population into human capital. For this, we require vigilant planning and effective execution machinery.

Universities are where one goes to in one's youth with great hope and expectation to build the future. It is the responsibility of the university to meet that expectation and guide our youths properly to come out with confidence in heart to take on this highly competitive world successfully. After all their success is the success of the institution. The university must maintain peaceful atmosphere for proper learning and at the same time impart quality education to our students. I have always been giving emphasis on updating the curriculum to demand of the present time. It is for the Vice-Chancellors to see that our universities are always at par with the best in the country in all terms like infrastructure, curriculum, facilities and above all a conducive atmosphere to pursue studies. It is good to find that our Vice-

Chancellors are very often invited either to give lecture or to attend national and international conferences and seminars outside the State. They should use the exposure and experience gained for the benefit of our students and development of our universities.

For universities to function as true centres of learning it is very much required to win the public to their side. This does not mean dilution of standards but rather an elevation of research and teaching programmes that can be meaningfully communicated outside the portals of the university. Research is an extremely important dimension of higher education. Search for information, ideas and thoughts is part and parcel of intellectual growth of human mind. Universities should create necessary infrastructure and encourage students to take up research and arrive at new findings and conclusions. Faculties must recognize that their core competence in universities is to advance knowledge through critical research. OUAT has taken a lead in research and released 127 high yielding crop varieties including rice which are popular in Orissa and neighbouring states. It is heartening that work and findings of our research scholars are well appreciated. However, I would like to urge that the findings from our research work must be made available to public through lectures, exhibitions, displays and other means. Public is an important stakeholder in university and when any initiative aimed at the good of the community around university they would then feel a sense of belonging with the institution and it will do a world of good to universities for their growth and advancement of knowledge.

'Gyanalok' is such a programme devised and implemented by me from 2008 where the university as a true public property works for the development of community by taking up a noble cause of removing illiteracy from the state. This programme has certainly brought university to the community as I feel universities should not be allowed to exist as ivory towers of knowledge in the midst of poverty and illiteracy. The figure states 25,375 volunteers of 676 NSS units of 362 colleges have been involved in this task and their effort helped in bringing 7,971 students to the mainstream. The progress has been promising but we are to cover many miles. It is my dream to make Orissa a fully literate State and I am leaving no stone unturned

to realize this dream. Because I am confident when Orissa achieves full literacy it will then one of the progressive states of India. Some universities have recorded splendid work while some require more thrust to their approach. I have the view that we must have a minimum target for each NSS unit to inch forward to our target. We will be discussing in detail in next session.

University must always look at the comfort of students, I mean to provide them best of things be it in academic, sports and games or other co-curricular activities so that they can pursue their dream. Students normally have grievances and if we are not quick to redress their worries and discomfort then it might turn into bigger proportion and lot of other undesirable things will creep in. University is not a place for any kind of violence and no violence or indiscipline can be tolerated. Therefore, we must develop quick redressal mechanism and see that nothing goes out of our hands. Faculties and employees must be friendly and cordial towards students so that good relation prevails which will make our work half done.

Students often complain about the delay in holding examinations and also publication of results as it ruins their career prospect. In earlier conferences and this time also I express my serious concern over this particular issue. It is the prime look out of university to hold examination in time and publish result in time. We must adhere to a specific academic calendar and do things accordingly. It is the responsibility of university administration to streamline examinations and publication of results of colleges under their jurisdiction. I cannot see that our students suffer and that too with no fault of theirs. I urge the Vice-Chancellors to take a serious note of this unfortunate development and see that this is put to an end. While looking at the comfort of students we must also take care of the interest of the employees who are working for the university and play key role in smooth functioning of the university. It is very unfortunate that the draft pension rule for introduction of uniform pension for employees of all the universities is yet to get a nod from the Department of Higher Education even after four years of its submission. Hon'ble Minister and Secretary are here and we expect that they take necessary step to stop this inordinate delay and which on materialization will bring smiles on the faces of employees.

This is not the only instance but there are several other instances which require immediate attention at the Department level but they are still pending. Take the case of Enactment of OUAT Act, Formulation of First Statute of Ravenshaw University or Recognition of Utkal University of Culture. These all are very important and they all need to get nod at the earliest. Another matter of concern is eviction of encroachments from university land. With allotment of land eviction it has been a recurring issue in successive annual conferences. Prompt action should be taken to get back our land. I would like to urge concerned authorities not to linger matter anymore. Vice-Chancellors should pursue the matter and make me informed from time to time. Moreover, we will be discussing in detail in next session and get clear picture where we stand. I expect quick and positive response. I look forward to positive views and suggestions from all concerned. Let all our efforts aim at improving various facets of universities and help our universities offer best education, enjoy public appreciation and give to the society good citizens.

Jai Hind.