

**SARDAR PATEL UNIVERSITY**

Vallabh Vidyanagar

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Chairman, Bajaj Auto**

It is a pleasure to be here at the convocation of Sardar Patel University. Especially, for the name it bears, its location and its achievements.

Sardar Patel has long been an idol for me. His contributions to the nation and his quiet competence & stoicism are well known. We were privileged to have him as our guest at my home town Wardha when the AICC, in the 1930s, would meet at Bajajwadi. A photo of his still hangs at Bajajwadi where he is sitting with Rajendra Prasadji, my grandfather Jamnalalji Bajaj, then the Treasurer of the Congress, and my father Kamalnayanji. The Sardar also inaugurated one of the institutions of Shiksha Mandal, an education trust of which I am currently the President.

The integration of the Princely States into the Indian Union will remain the Sardar's abiding contribution to the nation. One shudders to think what would have happened if the issue was allowed to linger. The one issue he could not deal with was Kashmir and it lingers to this day.

These environs, the Charotar area, not only gave us the Sardar but also Amul, an iconic achievement of this area which has inspired the nation.

I congratulate all those receiving their degrees today. You represent some of the best talent in the country. You will now on be the standard bearers of your alma mater. It has a very good name. Work to make that shine brighter.

I also congratulate your parents. At the root of the global competitiveness of the Indian people as individuals is the strength of the institution of the 'family' in our society. The resilience of our personalities is rooted in the unconditional love that we receive at home. I especially congratulate your mothers. Indian fathers are okay but Indian mothers are something very special.

I also congratulate your teachers. If one asks a successful person about the turning points in his life, very often a teacher is involved with it. To this tribe of teachers, my salutations.

It seems to me that the roots of achievement are almost unchanging. Curiosity, playfulness, camaraderie, a penchant for taking risks, a tenacity to carry on in the face of failure, a willingness to swim against the tide & many lucky breaks. Whether one is thinking of Alexander the Great or Einstein or Michelangelo or Gandhiji, these themes recur.

Real education should cultivate such patterns of thought and behavior. Does it? Almost worldwide educational institutions seem to be driving in reverse gear. We see rote learning, impatience with the questions of the student, pressure of marks leading to reproduction of right answers which kills creativity, a declining attraction of teaching as a vocation, etc.

At an educational institution, one gets knowledge and values. Knowledge can be got from many sources. But it is values that are more important in one's life. We imbibe them early and they are difficult to change. Any educational institution should be in my view more concerned about the values it imparts. Especially, when the external world is hostile to the values that need to be instilled in every decent human being. The values that need to be nurtured include integrity, simplicity, unselfishness, hard work, teamwork, etc. Are our institutions nurturing them? What values are they nurturing? This is something we need to be alive to.

It is the extra-curricular activities that one engages in school & college that prepare and benefit us in our professional lives, as much as our academic result. Real life is about initiative, about being able to build relationships, about being able to think on one's feet, about courage, about communication skills. All this is learnt more outside than in the class room. This is why there is the famous saying, "the battle of Waterloo was won on the playgrounds of Eton".

Our education system generally has too much of theory and too little of practice, while in better institutions across the world this balance is tilted in favor of "doing". In my view, learning is more complete and deeper in doing something practically than in merely bookish knowledge. We need doing thinkers rather than mere thinkers.

To the parents, who are here today, I say encourage your children, but do not burden them with unrealistic expectations. You are doing a wonderful job and are willing to sacrifice to help your child do well. Education has been & will be a way to create & recreate the basis of our prosperity. But, I think it is more important for the child to discover what he or she truly enjoys doing and make that his or her career. This engineer/doctor/MBA syndrome has run its course. There are so many new avenues opening up. In today & tomorrow's competitive world one has to be very good at what one does. And that requires a passion for that area. Forcing our children to do what seems the latest area with scope, may do them more harm than good.

You are now moving from a reasonably logical and predictable world to a world in which nothing moves in a straight line. The future has rarely been an extrapolation of the past. Discontinuity and uncertainty are the order of the day. It is in the very nature of an open economy that the forces of change will accelerate. You are better geared for this

environment than most people are, as you have been trained to be pro-change and pro-continuous learning in your outlook.

In the world of industry certainly, but increasingly in most fields, there is only so much that an individual, however gifted, can do. But there is nothing that a team can not achieve. You will have to work productively in teams; on whose membership you may have little choice. Besides technical talent and ability to function productively in teams, tenacity, hard work and a positive attitude are needed to deliver results.

As you step out in to the world there are three things in my view whose importance you will realise soon enough. These are of a positive attitude, of listening rather than speaking, and of continual learning.

A positive attitude is a big help. Critical but positive. There are many things that are wrong. But negativism does not correct them. It may highlight them. But to solve them, positive energy is required. And this I do not mean in an uncritical, all is hunky dory manner. But, in correctly and quickly identifying what needs to be done and then getting on and doing it.

The key source of value lies outside ourselves. For a company it lies with the customer. In science one first listens to nature to understand its order, before one uses that order. So, the beginning of everything is listening. But, most of us, especially the more intelligent and articulate we are, tend to

be eager to speak, not caring to listen. Our social and education system, crowded by voices as it is, tends to reward those who speak. This happens even in our work life. But now competition has increased and put listeners at a premium. For the listener knows what is really required to be done.

Life is a learning experience. Whether we do or don't learn is largely a measure of our choice and ability. In the learning economy of today, I somehow find the word 'learning' more apt than knowledge; it has become a necessity. The world as it now exists, runs on a process of continual value addition. Your learning will accelerate as you step out of these hallowed portals.

I would like to share with you some common traits which I have seen in outstanding engineers in Bajaj Auto where I have worked for the past 46 years.

1. Passion. They are completely dedicated to what they do, it is all that seems to matter in their world.
2. Focus. They always see the big picture, are not distracted by the small ones.
3. Excellence. They set the highest standards of professional integrity and performance.
4. Commitment. They lead from the front, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, come hell or high water and
5. Determination. They may lose a battle or two, but they never lose their spirit.

An organization which has employees with these traits is the darling of its customers and a terror to its competitors. The globalizing world outside is about 'survival of the fittest in a materialistic world'. When looking for people for his company, EDS, Ross Perrot explained his criteria for selection, 'I want people who love to win. And if I can't have them, then I want the ones who hate to lose'.

India is rising. We are the 4th largest economy in the world and our growth rate is faster than that of the developed world and likely to remain so in the foreseeable future. We also have one of the largest, youngest populations in an ageing world. This is creating and will create a huge opportunity for our country to improve its lot. The growth & change of the last two decades in our country reflect this opportunity and the efforts of countless Indians. However, with a low per capita income, widespread poverty, poor governance, we have a mountain to climb. But, we will climb it with hope in our hearts and a song on our lips. Gujarat has long been synonymous with enterprise. I am sure all of you will contribute to the development of Gujarat and India. I hope, coming from an institution with a great tradition & legacy, you will be conscious of your obligations and responsibilities towards society.

These are challenging times. Exciting times. The rewards for those who get it right will be enormous. But let us remember, when we go out and compete with the best, we not

only bat for ourselves, we bat for our country. We redefine what an Indian is, what India is. We set in motion a ripple of prosperity that travels far. We light a lamp, whose light and warmth lights other lamps, starting an endless chain of joy. This is our privilege. This is our responsibility. I am sure that all of you understand this and will do yourselves, your parents, your alma mater and your country proud.

Thank you.

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