

Sardar Patel University
Vallabh Vidyanagar

64th Annual Convocation
Sunday, 26th December 2021

CONVOCATION ADDRESS

Chief Guest

Dr. Vinay Sahasrabudhe

President

Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)

New Delhi

At the outset, let me express my deep sense of gratitude towards the entire leadership of Sardar Patel University, a university, of the educators, for the educators and by the educators. Let me also extend hearty congratulations to all those who have got their degrees today and also those distinguished students who have won prizes for their meritorious academic performance.

Friends, this is a convocation which traditionally we used to refer to as Deekshant Samarambh. From now onwards you are all Deekshits, that is persons who have been acquired knowledge and accepted the responsibility that comes with the knowledge. Acquiring knowledge is a humbling experience because the more you learn, the more you learn how less you have learnt. Learning is always endless. It makes one understand the very purpose of Human Life. Education, according to S Radhakrishnan, is **acquiring of knowledge beyond** what is academic and professional. Education is the assimilation of values and ideas for character building and preparing to face life's challenges.

India has essentially been a knowledge society since times immemorial. But today, we have become the third largest source country in so far as the number of students going abroad is concerned. When it comes to making India a global destination for higher education, we cannot forget the fact that India stands at 26th position as a destination for higher education. If we have to establish that we still continue to be a knowledge society, we will have to work towards three basic things. Firstly, understanding our own potential as knowledge society and making the world understand our knowledge potential. Secondly, we have to undertake special efforts to ensure that India attracts huge number of foreign students and thirdly, we have to work hard towards building great institutions, that can match high ranking institutions recognised globally.

When it comes to understanding our own potential, the strongest hurdle is our one ignorance about ourselves and our culture, and more dangerous to this, our inexplicably serious contempt towards our cultural and linguistic identities. Journalist and commentator Thomas Friedman has written a wonderful book titled 'The World is Flat'. This flattening of the world has happened because the so-called super powers of the world made us believe that whatever is indigenous is inferior. The world today finds itself in the grip of Americanisation, the process of which starts with a superiority complex that is inadvertently attached to the use of English language. In the case of India, the process of suppressing indigenous languages started in early 19th century. We are all aware of the designs of Lord Macaulay who had openly said in his minutes that we want 'interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, a class of persons Indians in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinions, words and intellect.' This colonial

game plan was very obvious but unfortunately, we chose to ignore the same. In his seminal work, 'Modern Religious Movements in India' J N Farquhar has very elaborately mentioned how indigenous languages, as per this game plan; were treated by the British in early 1830s. He says 'The New Education Policy of the Govt created during these years, the modern educated class of India. These are men who think and speak in English habitually, who are devoted to English literature and whose intellectual life has been almost entirely formed by the thoughts of the West. Large numbers of them enter Govt service while the rest practise law, medicine or teaching or take to journalism or business.' Now, happily the New Education Policy unveiled by the Govt under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi has rightly emphasised on making Indian languages, medium of knowledge dissemination. If one can learn medicine in Russia or Armenia in Russian or Armenian language, why cannot we learn the same in Gujarati or Kannada or Marathi? No body need to be against English language per se, but how can we discount the fact that language is a vehicle of culture and lifestyles. In English, they say 'apple a day, keeps the doctor away'. If we blindly follow this advice which is climate specific, simply because the language brings it to us, I am afraid the doctor will visit us frequently as eating apple everyday may not suit climatic conditions elsewhere. Hence, English in India will also have to evolve with an Indian flavour. And when it comes to Indian languages, if we don't strengthen them, enrich them further by making it a medium of our day-to-day communication who else will? Also, it is for all of us in India to make speaking in our languages a matter of prestige. We must be proficient in any language that we speak. English is an important language but that doesn't

mean those who cannot speak good English or even good Hindi are second class citizens. If we speak our mother tongue well, I am sure we can befriend with other tongue very effectively. Respecting mother tongue just as we respect our mother is something about which we cannot and should not compromise.

Now, the other most important question is how do we make India a global hub of higher education. India has an inspirational history of Nalanda, Takshashila and Vikramashila that served as the melting pot of scholars from across the world. Though we are far from those glory days, Indian education system is on its way to reconstruct itself. The government has embarked on several initiatives aimed at attracting a large cohort of foreign scholars to study in Indian universities, enriching our system through ideas and diversity.

From Bangladesh premier Shaikh Hasina to Aung San Suu Kyi and other leaders in public life in several Asian and African countries, who have studied in India speak endearingly about their experiences as students in India. However, statistics about countries attracting more foreign students explains us the nature of the challenge before us. According to reliable studies, India is the 26th destination country whereas it is the 3rd largest source country of students desirous of studying abroad. Over 7.5 lakh Indian students study abroad and unless we try to bring this number down by making Indian institutions more attractive in every possible way, our efforts to make India a global destination will not be adequately effective.

We all have to realise the overall and multi-dimensional importance of India becoming a hub of higher education. Our efforts, in this process would add great value to our

academic institutional establishments as per the global standards of knowledge era. We also would be hugely adding to our soft power potential. Efforts also needed from within India and from abroad. Influencing global educational opinion- making, forms a critical part of our agenda.

India becoming a Vishwa Guru is an attractive proposition. But for that, Herculean efforts with are needed on at least two fronts: firstly, Restructuring Academic Courses and secondly Building New Institutions of global standards as also strengthening old and existing institutions and making them globally competitive.

It would be a good idea to evolve a new category of academic courses as International Courses where there are stringent rules and regulations pertaining to content as well as conduct of courses, instructional methodology and overall assessment to move closer to the global benchmarking. Such courses could be across many Universities and agencies like NAAC or UGC can evaluate them and accord the status of an International Course. Such courses could be conducted only at certain Universities and Institutions that are earmarked, with the help of NAAC and UGC as Institutes Recommended for International Students (IRIS)? These IRIS Institutions will be mandated to maintain a particular standard of academic courses, appoint counsellors for foreign students, have ability to showcase their institution as an attractive destination abroad as also that already have adequate infrastructural facilities to take care of logistical needs.

Should there be a consensus on this we can also establish an Indian Network of International Education (INIE) with participation of all IRIS institutions, partner institutions

from abroad and institutes or organisations like ICCR and UGC, AICTE etc.

One must remember that international students will be looking for a certain value addition that learning in India may bring to them. Such value addition can happen if we also offer some incentive in the form of short courses in Traditional Indian Knowledge Systems (TIKS). Such courses may include subjects like Veda, Upanishads, Bharat Natyam or similar classical dances and classical music, Ayurveda and Yog etc. When world over experiments in multiculturalism are being undertaken with partial success, India provides a solution through our basic civilisational values of spiritual democracy, where Ekam Sat Vipra Bahuda Vadanti is the fundamental principle.

However, for all this to happen we need academic institutions of global standards. To that end, cultivating a scientific approach towards the process of institution building is extremely important. In our country persons like Pt Madan Mohan Malviya and Vikram Sarabhai are known as great institution builders. Strong motivation, stronger efforts and strongest commitment are the three essential ingredients of the process of institution building. Also needed is a no-nonsense professional approach in decision making. Institutional leaders with futuristic vision, free from myopia alone can set healthy precedents in any institutional life and that alone is the key to rule based institutional governance. Very unfortunately, more often than not; our private institutions are seen as family-owned businesses and public institutions are considered as owned by all and as result owned by none. Universities and colleges need leaders with a clear vision, a sense of mission and committed to build a true institution.

We have to remember that people have different expectations from educators, editors, thinkers and even artistes. What people expect from these is markedly different from their expectations from, say; bankers, industrialists or traders. This is because the people in the first category often give advice, deliver sermons or preach unlike those in the second category. Obviously then, people expect from educators, politicians and journalists that they will Practice what they preach. In the absence of this, people are smart enough to see an element of hypocrisy leading to contempt. If we have to avoid this, educational institutions, whether public or private; would do well committing themselves to a set of values and adopting a code of transparency and accountability.

The time you spent in this institution of higher learning is preparatory time. This reminds me of the Chinese bamboo. If you plant the seeds of Chinese Bamboo, you don't see any growth for as many as five years. Then suddenly one fine day, you see a little sprout. In the next six weeks the plant grows to a height of 90 feet. Therefore, the time that you spent here is time well spent.

I understand that you are also anxious about your future. You must be thinking of "What next?" In this regard, I would like to assure you that opportunities for you are plenty. Globalization has brought many international and multinational companies to our door step. You must understand the need and requirements of your prospective employers and try meet those demands. John Maxwell, a well-known American author once said "The illiterate of the future is not those who cannot read or write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn."

Finally, I am extremely happy that I could be with you in this joyous occasion. The degree that you have earned today is going to be with you lifelong. The knowledge you have gained will serve you lifelong. The experience that you have gained will be remembered by you lifelong. I wish you the best of everything in life.

Lastly, every institution needs a foundational philosophy, which is its Adhishthana, a Karta, who leads from the front, a variety of academic projects and programmes, and efforts in very many ways to achieve the institutional objective of excellence.

As Shrimad Bhagwat Geeta says —

अधिष्ठानमथाकर्ता, करणम्वपृथग्विद्म,
विविधश्चपृथक्चेष्टा, दैवचैवात्रपंचमम

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