

**FIRST CONVOCATION
VIDYASAGAR UNIVERSITY**

9 January 1995.

11 a.m.



CONVOCATION ADDRESS BY

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR

Professor S. N. Ghosh

Vidyasagar University Campus

VIDYASAGAR UNIVERSITY

MIDNAPORE—721 102

Respected Chancellor, most learned Guest Speaker Professor De, learned Principals of affiliated colleges, members of the Court, the Executive Council, and other Authorities of University, recipients of Degrees and Diplomas, distinguished Guests, my esteemed colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen, I welcome you all to this Convocation of Vidyasagar University.

This is the first time since the inception of the University that a convocation is being held here. I feel greatly honoured and thrilled to be associated with the first convocation of the university named after one of the most illustrious sons of our country, a man whose humane ideas, sense of social justice and personal courage — apart from his wide learning and humanistic scholarship have made him an unforgettable pioneer in the history of the country.

The germinal idea of founding an affiliating university in the district of Midnapore came from a man who is no more with us. I am referring to the late Professor A. K. Gayen, who during the last years of his life threw himself totally with a missionary zeal into the task of establishing this University, and succumbed to the strains of the task before its fulfilment. All of us who have assembled here today on the occasion

of the first convocation of what was the youngest university of the State only a few months back, cannot but feel for his absence with a deep sense of regret and emptiness. On behalf of the university community, I record our respectful homage to the late Professor Gayen. We also record with pain the loss of the former Chancellor of our university, Professor Syed Nurul Hasan, who was very keen to see this institution grow in stature as a centre of higher study. A man of erudition, sympathy, broad vision and open mind, Professor Hasan will be ever remembered by the university for his contribution to the development of this seat of learning. I do hope that the University will receive the same kind of patronage and encouragement from our present Chancellor, who is equally keenly interested in the affairs of this University. While we are on this note, I would also like to recall the valuable contributions of my worthy predecessors, who had put in all their energies to the building up of this university.

Unfortunately, for a number of unforeseen reasons this process of building up has not been able to gather as much momentum as was expected. As a result, the University, established by an Act in 1981 and starting its academic activities in the session 1985-86, still carries the syndrome of a rickety child born in poverty and growing up in deprivation. For the last

three years all construction work has remained suspended in midway, and both academic and administrative departments remain acutely understaffed. It cannot be predicted with any amount of certainty when the university will be able to develop strong sinews and attain the vigour of a healthy adult.

Unlike most of the sister institutions in the State, this university had to start from a scratch. The State Government donated about 145 acres of land for the construction of a self-sufficient university campus, where, apart from the different teaching blocks and administrative offices, students' hostels and staff quarters were also to be located. Recently, about 44 acres of additional land has been received from the State Government, but an acute paucity of funds has prevented the construction of new buildings and the completion of the ones started earlier to meet the basic and urgent developmental needs. The University, during its initial years, had to depend solely on the State Government's financial grants, as the U. G. C. was taking considerable time to shake off its hesitance in according to this university recognition of eligibility to receive grants from the Commission. The first modicum came in the later part of the Seventh Plan period, when the U. G. C. sanctioned ten teaching posts and a sum of Rupees Thirty lakhs as library and equipment grants. During

the Eighth Plan period, the University has so far received Rs. 22.6 lakhs out of a recommendation of Rs. 80 lakhs.

The University started with six postgraduate departments, and thirty undergraduate colleges previously affiliated to the University of Calcutta. For each of the six departments, six teaching posts were sanctioned by the State Government. These departments started work in 1985-86 with a total enrolment figure of 214 students for the six departments. In the second phase (1988-89), six other departments were opened—the total number of teaching posts approved by the State Government being only eighteen this time. The three bio-science departments were the last to be added (1989-90) to the University's postgraduate Faculty, with a total of nine posts sanctioned for the three departments. Thus the State's contribution to our existing teaching personnel is sixty-three, and that of the U. G. C. ten. This total number of 73 teachers, evidently, falls far short of the minimum requirement for the higher study and research in the 15 postgraduate departments. To make both ends meet, we have to depend heavily on guest teachers from outside. The picture is more dismal for the non-teaching staff. The whole administration is run by a small contingent of eighty non-teaching employees including eleven officers.

The number of affiliated colleges today is thirtythree with the addition of three new colleges to what we inherited from the University of Calcutta. There is a growing demand all round for the establishment of new colleges and also for affiliation to teach new subjects (both at the Honours and the Pass levels) in the existing colleges. But because of its own constraints - both financial and infrastructural - the University cannot easily grant such affiliation that would ultimately create a pressure on the University for admission of more students to the postgraduate classes. The present staff strength (both teaching and non-teaching), the built-up space, and equipment are far from adequate for meeting this demand. Even now, every year students graduating with Honours in Education, Geography, Sociology and Statistics have to seek admission to other Universities as there is no scope for pursuing postgraduate studies in these subjects at Vidyasagar University.

Although the scope for postgraduate studies has remained extremely limited for the last few years, the number of undergraduate students in the affiliated colleges has been increasing all the time. This has not only resulted in an increase in the number of applicants for admission to postgraduate classes, but has also put additional work load on the Controller's Department. With only 7 (seven) persons on its staff,

this department has been tackling, I should say, fairly successfully, the problem of conducting and publishing the examination results of about twenty thousand undergraduate and two thousand postgraduate students according to the schedule. Similarly, the Registrar's Department, virtually the nerve centre of any University administration, has to make do with 18 (eighteen) employees in carrying out the duties and responsibilities of the overall administration of the University. When one compares the situation in this University with that in even the non-affiliating Universities of the State, one is struck by the disparities in staff strength, teacher-student ratio, and resource allocation between one University and another. Even some of the affiliated colleges under this University have far better resource provision (in terms of staff strength, buildings, hostels and recreational facilities, etc.) than the University itself.

This tale of woe and misery, I am afraid, may sound out of tune with this occasion of pride and joy. It may produce discomfort in many minds and irk some. But it is perhaps necessary to know all the facts in order to understand the University's present status, its growth rate, its achievement or lack of it, its performance record during the past ten years.

However, it is with a sense of pride that I wish to report that the standard of education in our University

is not inferior to that in other Universities in the country. The performance of our students in the National Eligibility Test (NET), the General Aptitude for Technical Education (GATE) and the Documentation Research Training Centre (DRTC) Test conducted by Indian Statistical Institute, Bangalore, will bear evidence to this claim. Between April 1991 and December 1993, 24 students qualified in the NET and 47 in GATE, and almost every year several students of this University qualify in the DRTC Test.

As for research activities, I have to confess that the University is yet to attain a level comparable with that of the eminent Universities in the country — a level they have attained over many long years. Notwithstanding the demoralising handicap of equipment and infrastructure, the University has already produced a few doctorates who will be awarded the degrees at this Convocation. Some more have also completed their theses and have been waiting for submission / adjudication of the reports. In addition more than one hundred students are registered for the Ph. D. programme and have been working under the supervision of different teachers of this University. Most of them are likely to complete their work shortly.

For the promotion of research by individual teachers, the University has started allocating funds

in a small way from its own resources, and I expect we shall be able to increase the quantum gradually to bring it to a substantial magnitude. The University has also sanctioned cluster-wise grants for the departments to enable teachers to publish their research findings in the form of occasional papers and monographs. I expect these steps will provide encouragement to our teachers and the impact will be felt within the next few years. In addition, teachers of some of the departments have been able to procure grants from the UGC, CSIR, NCERT and DST for conducting research projects related to their own fields of specialization. I believe the University will be able to expand and organise its research activities sufficiently well within the next few years, and will be able to make its mark as a research centre.

It has not been possible for us to offer postgraduate course in any new subject after the academic session 1989-90, for reasons already stated. But with the approval of the State Government, we have opened postgraduate courses by correspondence in five subjects in this session (1994-95) in order to promote higher education through what is called the 'open learning system'. The enrolment figure for the five subjects taken together exceeds 3000, and it is likely to increase in the coming years, provided we are able to implement the programme with timeliness and

efficacy, with the cooperation of our own teachers and experts from outside. Here, too, the race began with handicaps and without adequate warming up, but the current progress promises well.

The University has also decided to introduce M. Phil. courses in a selected number of subjects as permitted by its limited resources and infrastructural facilities. We hope to accomplish this task very soon. Keeping in mind the interest of many students in finding a vocation in social service, recognition has been granted to the Master's Degree programme in social work, to be run by the Calcutta School of Social Work, which has been renamed Vidyasagar School of Social Work. This School, with its registered office and field work centre in Midnapore district, will have one-third of the total seats reserved for the graduates of this University.

The University library, though not well-stocked with the latest books and journals, has been gradually coming up. In spite of the limited resources, we have been trying to acquire new titles of a high standard and expand the services to users. At present the University, being more concerned with the needs of the students has to purchase text-books in sufficient numbers and provide them with reading materials. This constitutes the priority in the service expansion scheme, and is monitored by a duly constituted library committee.

Regarding the University administration, I should like to declare that the Executive Council, the Faculty Councils for the Postgraduate and Undergraduate Studies, the different Boards of Studies both at the Postgraduate and Undergraduate levels, and the Finance Committee have been functioning according to the provisions of the Act and the Statutes, and any loopholes in the administrative machinery are being looked after with all possible vigilance. Wherever necessary and possible, the University has been sending its staff to attend seminars and workshops to receive training for improvement in the quality of performance.

The activities of the Controller's department are being streamlined for higher efficiency. In the process, we have introduced a computerised method for publication of results. As a newly introduced system, the process is yet to reach perfection, but we are trying hard to make it fault-free. I am glad to report that the monitoring cell consisting of members of the Undergraduate Council, Principals of a number of colleges, and staff members of the Controller's Department are working unitedly for speeding up and perfecting the publication of results.

The University, through its Inspectorate of Colleges and the Undergraduate Council, has been maintaining liaison with its affiliating colleges, and

problems, if any, are being sorted out at the appropriate level through discussion. To foster cooperation and goodwill between undergraduate and postgraduate students, the University has been organising regularly an annual inter-collegiate sports meet and football tournament, and occasional debating and essay writing competitions and other cultural functions. All these activities, admittedly, deserve much greater attention.

The University has also been participating in some all-India sports events held under the sports wing of the Association of Indian Universities. The performance of our contingent composed of both UG and PG students is quite laudable, and I am led to believe from the records so far achieved that if properly coached and trained, the students of our colleges and University are likely to make their mark in the intra- and inter-zonal sports meets.

The NSS and the NCC units of the University and its affiliated colleges have regularly been taking part in different local and national programmes, and fairly frequently organize joint seminars, sometimes in collaboration with their counterparts at IIT, Kharagpur.

Although we have tried to encourage student activities, the fact remains that we have not been able to provide them with adequate amenities. We have not yet been able to provide them with hostel accommodation on the campus. Nor have residential

facilities been provided to the majority of our teaching and non-teaching staff. The students stay in small rented houses in the town, about 3-4 km from the campus, where 5 to 6 students have to share a room that can hardly accommodate 2 to 3. Even this apology for a facility is available only to a fortunate few. Many students have to arrange their own board and lodging, and live in a more distressing condition. The University has been able to provide residential flats only to a handful of teachers and other staff. With most of the university community living outside the campus, the situation is not at all congenial to and consistent with the concept of a campus university. The fortitude with which the students, staff, and teachers have been taking the situation in their stride is admirable indeed. And yet, while I thank them all for their forbearance, I cannot deny that the University is devoid of a sense of home — it is yet to grow into a home of learning.

The University started with the objective of teaching and developing non-conventional subjects, but had later to stray a little away from this original idea in the case of some subjects, because the students passing out with degrees in these subjects did not find ready employment. A brief but disenchanting experience more or less forced some of the departments to

revert to teaching what is called traditional or conventional subjects.

The members of this august assembly will, I believe, agree with me that in a complicated and fast-changing world, it has become all the more difficult to determine and set priority to the aims and objectives of higher education. A scientifically advanced, technologically sophisticated, and computer co-ordinated society has its own demands. It can, no doubt, create conditions for amazing inventions and comfortable material life, but it generates, at the same time, a craving for wealth and luxurious living, and an attitude of cut-throat competition and smug self-seeking. Even when the means does not permit the indulgence, the standard of consumption tends to rise. The first casualty in the tussle is the human values and ideals which man has cultivated and developed through the ages. Technological advancement alone cannot resist this erosion of values. Nor can it generate new values that would be in complete harmony with or are a suitable substitute for our perennial value-system.

Human beings, after all, cannot be viewed simply as raw material to be processed merely through vocationalised education or through 'restructured and redesigned' university courses of 'perfect matching with the demands of the employment market'. Some

kind of 'mismatch', I beg to submit, is bound to continue. Vocational training or reorientation of courses at the college or the university-level will only change the character of the mismatch, and the new kind of mismatch will be manifested in the disparity between the number of the vocationally trained or technically equipped personnel and the available job opportunities. What is necessary for a real match is the expansion of the jobmarket with room for new specifications and differentiations — a task for the planners to consider. To my mind, the chief concern of a university should be to develop a complete man—a man with a proper blending of knowledge and wisdom, a man having not only an adequate skill in his own subject or trade or vocation, but also compassion, a sense of social responsibility and commitment, an ethical sense (honesty), tolerance and empathy, as Russell observed in his essay on university education. Without simultaneous development of both the aspects, development of human resources, in the true sense of the term, cannot be complete and satisfactory.

Nor can we expect to preserve and ensure social sanity unless we are able to make these qualities essential strands of the human mind. The task is not easy, and invasion by extraneous factors makes it all the more complex. But a university as the apex

body of a teaching-learning system must meet this challenge with the co-ordinated efforts of all its segments. The extent to which it will be able to do so, will determine the degree of its success in the attainment of the aims and objectives of university education. Our University has to be successful in this mission. Let me repeat the words of Sir James William Colville, who said at the first Convocation of the first university of our country, "....we must be patient, we recollect that we are not merely planting an exotic. We are planting a tree of slow growth. The plant is young and tender, and obstructed by weeds and brambles. But it is healthy, and if carefully tended will become a goodly tree and overshadow the land."

Before I conclude I must express my heart-felt gratitude to our Chancellor, the Honourable Governor of West Bengal, for being with us on this memorable occasion. His very presence, I earnestly believe, will serve as a source of inspiration to us in all our future activities.

I am also thankful to our learned guest speaker who was gracious enough to accept our invitation and address this Convocation. I am convinced that you will find his address instructive and enlightening.

Dr. Mukhopadhyay and Sri Guha who have come all the way to this small town of limited resources and

attractions to receive in person the Special Medals have actually honoured us by giving us the opportunity to honour them.

I sincerely record our appreciation for the generosity shown by the donors of all endowment medals, prizes and scholarships towards this young University for the promotion and encouragement of the undergraduate and postgraduate students. I expect many more to come forward with the same kind of generosity and incentives for the students.

Finally, I must express my admiration for the enthusiasm and hard work put in by all sections of the University community in clearing up the accumulated task of eight years so that the Convocation could be held.

I thank all who are present here today for participating in the Convocation.
