

Our most respected Chancellor, His Excellency, Shri Gopalkrishna Gandhi, Honourable Chief Guest Professor Rajasekharan Pillai, who is currently the Honourable Vice-Chancellor of Indira Gandhi National Open University, esteemed recipients of Doctor of Literature (Honoris Causa) Degree, Professor Tapan Raychaudhuri, the noted historian and Mr. Azharuddin Khan, the noted litterateur and literary critic, Honourable recipient of Doctor of Science (Honoris Causa) Degree, Professor Mihir Chowdhury, the noted Scientist in Physical Chemistry, Honourable members of the Court and the Executive Council of the University, Faculty Members, Officers and other staff members of the University Community, recipients of Degrees, Medals and Prizes, distinguished guests, representatives from the media, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I deem it a great privilege on my part to welcome you all to this Twelfth Convocation of our beloved University on behalf of the Vidyasagar University and also on my own behalf.

I am particularly grateful to our Chancellor, Honourable Shri Gopalkrishna Gandhi, who himself bears the rich heritage of our glorious freedom struggle but who has earned the love, affection and respect of the people of the State because of his rich sensitivity, humanism and intellect, for having kindly accepted our invitation to preside over this Convocation today. Sir, we are greatly honoured by your august presence in this University Convocation and on behalf of the entire University Community I assure you, Sir, that in this Silver Jubilee Year of the University, we are rededicating ourselves to the cause of expansion of education and the cause of excellence in education – the goals which were so dear to the heart of Pandit Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, a great social reformer and educationist belonging to this district, after whose name this University has been created.

I extend, on behalf of the University, a very special welcome to Professor Rajasekharan Pillai, whose experience in science teaching and research and in the area of educational administration has been substantial. A renowned teacher and researcher in the field of Chemical Sciences, Professor Pillai was in the Visiting Research Professor positions in the Universities of Tübingen, Mainz (Germany) and Lausanne (Switzerland). He had a distinguished tenure as the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the University Grants Commission, as the Director of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council and as the Vice-Chancellor of the Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala. As Director of NAAC he ensured the initiatives in the field of quality and excellence which has since been further consolidated. We are sure that with the vast reservoir of talent and experience which he possesses, Professor Pillai, as the Vice-Chancellor of IGNOU, will give a new dimension to the field of distance education in the country.

The Executive Council and the Court of our University have, this year, unanimously recommended, and the Honourable Chancellor has duly assented, to confer the Degree of Doctor of Literature (Honoris Causa) on 1) Professor Tapan Raychaudhuri, a noted historian who made remarkable contributions to the study of India's Pre-colonial and Colonial Past and also subsequently, to the Post Colonial Period and subjects of Indian History that are new in theme and content and on 2) Azharuddin Khan, who had a humble origin and a moderate professional life but who has shown his power of creativity as a literary critique and a biographer of known and not so known litterateurs of this part of the country. With the kind consent of the Honourable Chancellor, the Executive Council and the Court also felt honoured to confer the Degree of Doctor of Science (Honoris Causa) on Professor Mihir Chowdhury who has had a lifelong mission of acting as a renowned teacher and researcher in the field of Physical Chemistry and whose single contributions in the field of Laser Spectroscopy and Photodynamics are known the world-over. The University feels highly privileged to honour these three outstanding academicians on this auspicious day of the Convocation. They represent a role model of what an academician should be like. I feel also very much honoured in welcoming all my previous Vice-Chancellors present here, other distinguished guests and media persons who have joined us on this happy occasion.

Since March 2006 when the last Convocation of the University was held, the University has accelerated its growth and has taken significant strides in the field of teaching, research and academic activities. Within this period, the University has awarded Ph.D. Degrees to 39 candidates, of which 30 are in Science subjects and 09 are in the fields of Humanities and Social Sciences. This is a significant increase in the number of Ph.D.s as compared to 32 Ph.D. awardees in 2005 and 15 Ph.D. awardees in the year 2004. In the last Session, Master Degrees have been awarded to 5357 candidates, both in the Regular and Distance Education modes. Undergraduate Degrees have been awarded to 10993 candidates belonging to Honours and General Courses and to the successful candidates among 1467 (1167 & 300) who appeared at the B.Ed & B.P.Ed. Examinations - 2006.

I am also delighted to mention that in the current Session two new Postgraduate Courses have been opened in the University viz. MBA and Mass Communications & Videography. These are the two professional courses which are much in demand. The Computer Centre of the University has opened a number of new Courses under VU-CMC Collaborative Programme. These new Courses are a) Postgraduate Diploma in Applied Computer Science, b) Diploma in Advance Hardware and Networking Administration and c) Certificate Course in Basic and Advance Java. Affiliation has been extended to Vidyasagar Institute of Health for opening M.Sc. in Nutrition and Dietetics and to the Oriental Association for Education and Research for opening M.Sc. Courses in

Biotechnology and Biochemistry in its two campuses situated at Midnapore and Burdwan. We are going to submit a number of new proposals to the UGC for opening new Courses of study in our XIth Plan Proposal. Thus the University is maximising its efforts to provide diversified course structures for its students. It may also be mentioned here that, from this year, Semester System has been introduced in the Departments of Microbiology, Physics & Technophysics, Computer Science, Economics, Aquaculture Management & Technology and Bio-Medical Laboratory Science & Management and is also going to be introduced in the other Departments, very soon.

In order to meet the increasing demand for higher education, Postgraduate Programmes have been opened in the last one year in an additional number of UG Colleges. These are Chemistry in Midnapore College, Physics in Contai P. K. College, Sanskrit in Ghatal R. S. Mahavidyalaya, Zoology in Jhargram Government College and Bengali in Tamralipta Mahavidyalaya. A new College in Debra, known as Debra Thana Shahid Kshudiram Mahavidyalaya, has been opened during this year. A new B.Ed. College, namely Dr. B. R. Ambedkar College, Malighati, has also been opened during this year after obtaining approval of NCTE. The excellent achievements of the affiliated Colleges in the sphere of NAAC accreditation continued for this year also and so far about 20 Colleges affiliated to this University have been assessed by NAAC and have registered their thrust for quality. In the Undergraduate examinations, internal assessment system has been introduced and 10% of marks are allotted to the Colleges which they award on the basis of class tests held regularly. As per our report, this new system has considerably improved the academic situation in Colleges. Question Banks have also been introduced from this year.

Despite "the constraints of manpower, equipment, library, working space and financial constraints" as admitted by the UGC 10th Plan Visiting Committee, our Postgraduate Departments have been carrying on their R & D activities. Under the DST, FIST Project, the Department of Physics has received a Grant of Rs. 60 Lakhs in this year. In continuation of FIST programme sanctioned earlier, the Department of Geography has received this year Rs. 29.50 Lakhs and the Department of Zoology Rs. 9.00 Lakhs. More Research Grants have been pouring in from such institutions as UGC, DST, DBT, CSIR, WBPCB, DRDO etc. The Departments which have received such types of Project Grants are Physiology (Prof. Tushar Kanti Ghosh, DRDO – Rs. 9.84 Lakhs, Dr. Chandradipa Ghosh, DST – Rs. 20.00 Lakhs, Dr. P. C. Dhara, DST – Rs. 3.00 Lakhs, CSIR – Rs. 8.9 Lakhs, DRDO – Rs. 4.90 Lakhs, Prof. Somenath Roy, DST – Rs. 3.00 Lakhs), Zoology (Prof. Susanta Kumar Chakraborty, UGC – Rs. 9.77 Lakhs, WBPCB – Rs. 4.17 Lakhs), Microbiology (Dr. K. C. Mondal and Prof. B. R. Pati, DRDO – Rs. 7.51 Lakhs, Dr. D. Banerjee and Prof. B. R. Pati – Rs. 5.90 Lakhs and Prof. B. R. Pati, Bio-informatics – Rs. 20 Lakhs), Chemistry (Dr. S. Islam, UGC – Rs. 7.72 Lakhs and DST – Rs. 23.71 Lakhs), Dr. A. K. Mishra, DST – Rs. 8.51 Lakhs), Geography

(Dr. A. K. Paul, UGC – Rs. 0.93 Lakhs, Dr. Ramkrishna Maity, UGC – Rs. 1 Lakh), Anthropology (Dr. K. S. Bose, DST – Rs. 2.72 Lakhs, UGC – Rs. 4.29 Lakhs, ICMR – Rs. 5.71 Lakhs, Dr. A. Guha & Dr. S. Patra of the Department of Sociology, UGC – Rs. 0.50 Lakh), Bio-Medical Laboratory Science & Management (Dr. D. Ghosh, UGC – Rs. 7.43 Lakhs), Mathematics (Dr. M. M. Pal, DST – Rs. 0.30 Lakhs), Economics (Prof. S. N. Sau, UGC – Rs. 2.89 Lakhs, Dr. D. Mondal, WBSLUB – Rs. 1.20 Lakhs), Commerce (Prof. A. Gupta, UGC – Rs. 1.72 Lakhs), History (Dr. U. Bhattacharya, Makaias Project – Rs. 2.00 Lakhs), Bengali (Dr. Srutinath Chakraborty, UGC – Rs. 4.43 Lakhs) and Sociology (S. A. H. Moinuddin, WBSRDA – Rs. 1.92 Lakhs and Dr. D. Mukhopadhyay, Zilla Parishad – Rs. 1.98 Lakhs). I take this opportunity to congratulate all these teachers and urge upon others to be proactive in bringing external research support.

The Department of Botany & Forestry has been continuing its programme of acting as Nodal Centre for the programme of Eastern Region Networking on Joint Forest Management funded by SPWD, New Delhi. Two neighbouring States viz. Orissa and Jharkhand are also covered under this programme.

Individual achievements of some of our teachers and students are also noteworthy. Dr. P. C. Dhara of the Department of Physiology has obtained a Design Registration from Patent Office, Government of India for one of his designs. Dr. B. G. Bag of the Department of Chemistry has filed a Patent on one of his discoveries. Shri Parthasarathi Mukhopadhyay of the Department of Library & Information Science has been selected as the 'Promising Young Professional' by the International Federation of Library Association. Dr. Abhijit Guha worked as a Visiting Fellow at the Department of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics, Delhi University, for two months in 2006. Shri Santanu Kar Mahapatra, a Research Scholar of the Department of Physiology, has won the Best Paper Award from the Poster Session of the Science Congress 2007. Dr. Joydev Maity, Lecturer, Aquaculture Management & Technology, has received the Junior Scientist of the Year Award from the National Environmental Science Academy. Shri Sandip Chakraborty, an ex-Research Scholar of the Department of Physiology has got a scholarship for three years in M D Anderson Cancer Research Institute, Texas University, USA for research work. One Ph.D. Scholar of the Department of Microbiology has received First Prize for presentation of Paper at the Annual Conference of the Association of Microbiologists in India held in Bhopal.

Collaborative Programmes involving our University Departments and external Institutions and Agencies have been going on as in previous years. Some of such new Programmes adopted this year are: a MOU has been signed between NISTADS, Government of India and the University for technology collaboration and technology upgradation in rural areas involving the rural poor; the Microbiology Department has signed two MOUs with MSV Laboratories for

production of biofertilizers and biopesticides and Ulysses Pharmaceuticals for quality improvement of pharma products; the Aquaculture Management & Technology Department has taken initiative for collaboration with Latika Sea Food Products and with Sri Balaji Feed Trades for providing technology collaboration. The Computer Science Centre of our University has been providing technology assistance to affiliated Colleges to introduce Networking Systems and Web-based materials. The Department of Applied Mathematics has been monitoring the Automatic Weather Station in collaboration with University of Calcutta under DST Project.

A good number of our teachers have been invited to present Papers or to deliver Lectures in International Conferences held abroad. Thus, Prof. J. K. Sarkhel went to Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, Prof. T. Das Purkayastha at Santa Clara University, California, Dr. Falguni Chakraborty at Lisbon, Portugal, Dr. B. G. Bag at Dresden, Germany, Dr. Abhijit Guha at Alexandria, Egypt, Prof. Somenath Roy at Texas, USA, Shri Ambarish Mukhopadhyay and Dr. Raj Kumar Kothari at Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA, Dr. Subrata Kumar De at Leipzig, Germany and at Sapporo, Japan and Dr. Ujjain Bhattacharya at Ogden, USA. Similarly, Seminars/Workshops held within India have been attended by many of our Faculty Members and Officers. Our records show that, in the last year, our teachers have attended 35 such Seminars/Workshops held within India. It would not be an exaggeration to say that our teachers and students are maximising their efforts to be a part of the academic mainstream.

A good number of National Level and State Level Seminars have been organized by different teaching departments within the last one year. The Departments which have organized such Seminars are the Departments of Anthropology, Microbiology, Library & Information Science, Philosophy & the Life-World, Bengali, Geography & Environment Management, Economics with Rural Development, English, Commerce & Farm Management and Aquaculture Management & Technology. The initiatives taken by many other Departments could not be materialized due to lack of resources. In addition, a good number of Special Lecture Programmes have been organized with the help of Visiting Professors/Fellows. The Department of Philosophy & the Life-World organized one UGC Sponsored Refresher Course on "Ethics and Social Philosophy".

Infrastructural support for the University has considerably been strengthened within this period. Work on the much-awaited Einstein Building has started which will have a floor-wise covered space of approx. 28,000 sq. ft. and for which Rs. 50.00 Lakhs has been received from the UGC. Another 10 Lakhs of rupees has been received for the construction of a Silver Jubilee Humanities Building. We have also received Rs. 37.00 Lakhs from the UGC for the construction of Students' Amenities Centre and another Rs. 12.5 Lakhs for

building up Infrastructural Support for Women Students and Staff. Work on all these Projects have already been started. Construction work for additional Staff Quarters is well in progress as also the Boundary Wall of the whole University. The University is now having its full fledged Sports Ground.

There has been a further consolidation in the functioning of the Computer Centre and the UGC INFONET Programme of the University. The Computer Centre has organized a number of computer awareness and literacy Courses. It has started providing Computational and Research & Development facilities to all Research Scholars, Faculty Members and PG Students. Bandwidth has been extended to 1 MBPS along with Broadband facilities. Internet facilities have been extended to 175 computers. We have received a Grant of Rs. 30.00 Lakhs from the UGC Centre for the upgradation of Computer Centre.

The Directorate of Distance Education of our University has received a Grant of Rs. 40.00 Lakhs from the Distance Education Council and infrastructural facilities are being consolidated, students' support services are being strengthened and network facility is being increased with the help of this Grant. A full new additional floor has been added to our DDE Building and this will help us in meeting the constraints of space. But the problem relating to timely publication of results and the availability of self-instructional materials for the DDE students still persist.

In order to assist the students in choosing their career opportunities, a Placement Cell, with the Dean of Students' Welfare as its Convener, has been functioning. The Placement Cell has organized campus interviews for students belonging to different streams of Science, Technology and Social Sciences. GTFS and PRADAN organized such interviews in the last year. Similar activity has been done in respect of students of MCA, Computer Science and Electronics. The MCA students appeared at the campus interview of IBM and US Technology. This year, 5 more multinational companies have organized campus interviews till the month of March.

The University Library functioning has expanded in terms of users, documents as well as services. The space of the Central Library has been increased. In the newly constructed third floor of the Library, a spacious Reading cum Reference Room has been provided. A book elevator has been installed. A Xerox Centre within the Library premises has been set up. Along with computerization, the Library has simultaneously started Digitization Programme. Thousands of Journals can be accessed on-line free of cost. For this, one need not come to the Library also. On-line materials can be accessed from any terminal within the campus.

The NSS Units have been carrying on their in-campus and outreach 'Campus to Community' activities as usual. This year, 113 Units out of 120 could be activated involving 11,900 volunteers. In comparison with the achievements of the last year, five more Units involving 900 volunteers have been activated this year. 59 Special Camping Programmes have been organized during the period between April 2006 and January 2007, apart from undertaking normal activities including Programmes on AIDS and HIV, Pulse Polio Immunization, Social Forestry, Scientific Awareness, Environmental Protection, Literacy and other Health and Hygiene Measures. Two volunteers from the University were selected for participation at the Republic Day Parade at New Delhi. One of our female volunteers joined the Global Yoga Festival in last December. She also participated in the Commonwealth Day Celebration Programmes held in Singapore last year.

The Medical Unit of the University has been functioning actively. It had arranged a 'Health Check-up Programme' amongst the First Year students of the Postgraduate Departments of the University for the year 2006. The number of patients availing the facilities at the Medical Unit has also increased significantly during the current year. In collaboration with our NSS Units, the Medical Unit organized a number of Seminars on Health Awareness and Sanitation Programmes. We are considering ways for further consolidating the activities of our Medical Unit.

As far as the sports and cultural activities of our students are concerned, the University had organized Inter College Football, Volleyball and Kho Kho Tournaments in the newly developed Sports Ground of the University in connection with the celebration of its Silver Jubilee Programme. Our Football Team participated in the East Zone Inter Varsity Football Tournament and qualified for the All India Tournament. Inter College and PG Athletic Meet was also held in February this year. Our students also participated in the Table Tennis Competition and Swimming Competition.

Inter Collegiate and PG Cultural Meet was also organized for selection of representatives for the East Zone Inter Varsity Youth Festival. Our Cultural Team succeeded in five cultural events in East Zone Inter Varsity Youth Festival held at BIT, Mesra, Ranchi. Our Team qualified in the Group Song Event for participation in the National Youth Festival held in the University of Madras in January 2007. Our students won the 3rd Position in the National Youth Festival.

Honourable Chancellor Sir, distinguished participants and dear students, it is now universally recognized that the significance of higher education in the nation-building process has increased tremendously. With the creation of a knowledge society, there is the increasing demand for a skilled manpower. The transformation of economy and society in the Twenty-first Century would

depend, in significant part, on the spread and quality of education among our people, particularly in the sphere of higher education. And it is only an inclusive society that can provide the foundations of a knowledge society.

The National Knowledge Commission, while identifying the areas of reform and change in our higher education system, has mentioned three areas of crucial significance. These are the problems of expansion, the problem of excellence and the problem of inclusion.

While there has been a remarkable growth in the number of Universities and Colleges in India since Independence from 25 and 700 in 1947 to 354 and 17625 in 2005, and the number of student enrolment has increased from 0.1 million in 1947 to 10.48 million in 2005, yet the percentage of age-cohorts attending such higher educational institutions today is just 7.5% in India as compared to such developing countries as Indonesia (11%), Brazil (12%) and Thailand (19%). Increase of literacy rate by 10% in the last ten years, though unsatisfactory, implies the availability of a larger number of students. There will also be the impact of SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan) on higher education in the next eight to ten years. To cope with this situation, there has been the emergence of new types of providers of higher education. Private institutions have proliferated, distance education programmes have substantially expanded, new Colleges and Universities have been established, public Universities and Colleges have started self-financing programmes, foreign institutions started offering programmes either by themselves or through franchisees and another 74 deemed to be Universities have been set up. This unplanned expansion has, instead of solving the problem of growth, made the situation more problematic and chaotic. The suggestion of the National Knowledge Commission to establish 1500 Universities nationwide including 50 'National Universities' to enable India to attain a gross enrolment ratio of at least 15% by 2015, seems to be unrealistic at the moment but the suggestion reveals the gigantic nature of the problem to cope with the phenomenon of expansion.

The issues of quality and excellence are equally important, if not more important. This implies a thorough overhauling of the management structure to make the system more responsive, accountable and transparent, restructuring of curricula, restructuring of the examination system, introduction of course credit system along with the provision for credit transfer, vast improvement in infrastructure and support system for teaching-learning process, introduction and upgradation of ICT facilities, restructuring of affiliated College system and provision for more autonomy etc. In fact, this list is illustrative and not exhaustive.

A systemic analysis of the level of research output and the nature of infrastructural facilities for research needs to be made also. In our country, the

number of persons engaged in research is only 119 per million of population whereas the corresponding figures are 5287 in case of Japan and 4484 in case of USA. The National Science Foundation data 2002 show that in the US about four percent of the Science and Engineering Graduates get Doctorate Degrees. This figure is about 7% for Europe. In India, this is not even 0.4%. This meagre research output is again concentrated in a small number of higher educational institutions. Of the Engineering Doctorates, more than 80% are from the 20 top Universities and of the Science Doctorates 65% of the Doctorates awarded are from the top 30 Universities. As for the quality of such Doctorate Degrees, the research citation index shows that India is lagging far behind not only the developed countries but behind many other developing countries as well.

The issue of inclusion of the hitherto excluded is another big problem. It implies ensuring access for all deserving students and ensuring access to education for economically and historically socially underprivileged students. This implies reservation but does not end with reservation. The reservation issue has been made more complicated by the recent Supreme Court Judgement in stalling reservation for the backward classes in Central Government institutions. The National Knowledge Commission in its recent Report submitted to the Central Government has suggested the development of a cumulative deprivation index to cope with the problem. To quote from the National Knowledge Commission Report, "Disparities in educational attainments are related to caste and social groups, but are also strongly related to other indicators such as income, gender, region and place of residence. Therefore, we need to develop a meaningful and comprehensive framework that would account for the multidimensionality of differences that still persist. For example, a deprivation index could be used to provide weighted scores to students and the cumulative score could be used to supplement a student's school examination score". We consider that this suggestion of the National Knowledge Commission is worth examining in order to set the direction of the affirmative action to be initiated by the Government to solve the problem of the 'inclusion of the excluded'.

In formulating the Policy Paper for the XIth Plan, the UGC has rightly given emphasis on a number of projects for Universities like that of ours which are situated in remote, rural and backward areas. It is a recognition of the fact that of the 350 odd Universities, 131 are affiliating Universities and they contribute around 89% of the total enrolment. Most of these affiliating Universities are situated in rural areas and there is a widening gap between the metropolitan and rural Universities as regards the infrastructural resources are concerned and as regards, the quality of the output is concerned. Andre Beteille, the famous Sociologist, observed, "The drive to make higher education socially inclusive has led to a sudden and dramatic increase in numbers without a proportionate increase in material and intellectual resources. As a result,

academic standards have become unsettled and have been placed in jeopardy the University system in our country since the 1960s”.

While this is a position about the Universities in general, this is particularly true about most of the rural Universities. While our students have to compete at par with the products of Universities which are resource-rich, our students are suffering from many types of deprivations – a resource crunch situation, lack of adequate number of teachers and an inadequately equipped infrastructural set up and a relatively underdeveloped situation of an over-all academic milieu. The problem of an inadequate number of teachers have been compounded by the frequent tendency on the part of many of them to switch over to Universities located in central places. Replacements become difficult and the students suffer as a result of that. In such a context, the National Knowledge Commission's recommendation to rethink the issue of salary differentials within and between Universities along with other means of attracting and retaining talented Faculty Members is worth considering.

Before I conclude, I extend my warm welcome to all the recipients of Degrees and distinctions at today's ceremonial function. My dear young Graduates, you are at the threshold of entering into a new world, a world full of challenges and opportunities. Achievements in life are always driven by visions and goals. We have so many problems but there is no reason for despair, provided you work hard and with determination to realize your full potential. The University, your alma mater, will always be by your side in helping you to win your life's battle. All my best wishes to you all.

Once again, I convey my deepest regards and thanks to all those who have assembled here to make the Twelfth Convocation a success.

Thank you all.