

VIDYASAGAR UNIVERSITY



Fourth Convocation

Address by
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Vice-Chancellor

5 March 1999
VIDYASAGAR UNIVERSITY CAMPUS
MIDNAPORE 721 102
WEST BENGAL

Respected Chancellor, respected Chief Guest, predecessor Vice-Chancellors, Deans of Faculties my colleagues, members of the Court; members of the Executive Council, Finance Committee, Faculty Councils for Postgraduate Studies, Councils for Undergraduate Studies; college principals, guests, members of the press and the media, colleagues—teaching, non-teaching, administrative—students, research scholars, ladies and gentlemen :

And graduates who have just received their conferment :

May I accord you a hearty welcome. The conferment is going to be followed soon by the giving away of the degree scrolls, to doctorates and masters alone, not bachelors whose number is too big for this assembly and who have been requested to collect their scrolls from their colleges, though the bachelor rank-holders and merit-earners have not been excluded from the ceremony. This is our fourth Convocation and we are involved here with the graduates of 1997 examinations, only in two cases with those of the 1996 one as well. Though all our 1998 results have been long published we could not convoke those graduates here, for their review marks for grade improvement have not all come in. Of course our doctorates are recentmost. Our masters include also those who have taken their degree by the distance mode. The distance pre-masters too are here, those who have passed the one-year Bridge Course. We shall give away scrolls to these latter as well.

Speaking of the distance mode, we are happy to record that our science master's venture begun last year has come off quite well and to the last year's offering of Botany and Forestry we have added a second subject this year, Physics and Technophysics. However, the science intake is limited for reasons of laboratory programming. The enrolment in other master's and the Bridge Course has gone up and we are fully covered now by the norms of the Distance Education Council. In fact the Council has offered us some financial support for infrastructure development. And our plan to build up new space for the diverse use of the Directorate is going to materialise before long. We are also exploring the possibility of opening study centres in various places. Incidentally, our off-campus enrolment camps have been a success.

Between the last convocation and this, we have also made progress elsewhere. Our twenty-four-unit Teachers' Hostel has been completed and is

fully occupied now. It was inaugurated by Sri Benoy Krishna Chowdhury. Our Girls' Hostel annexe too has been commissioned. The Boys' Hostel is about completed and should be soon ready for possession. The work on the twenty-four-unit Non-Teaching Staff Hostel has accelerated and we expect completion in four months or so. More construction is afoot. From the Ninth Plan allocation of the University Grants Commission we are building a much needed extension to our academic space. At the same time we are ourselves funding an equally needed extension to the Administrative Building. Last but not least we are building a long-awaited enclosure for cycles. Before long we hope to see our dirt roads on campus metalled : a scheme to that effect has been submitted to the State Government. And we also hope to see a statue of Vidyasagar installed on campus the process for which has begun sometime ago. We are indeed grateful to the State for an all-out support in the completion of the present phase of campus building and we look forward to the coming phase with all eagerness, for the campus still lacks some essential facilities like a full-fledged guest house, a sports ground, an auditorium and a stable water supply system. As to our power supply we are still on a rural feeder causing occasional intermittence and we look forward to a dedicated line.

We acknowledge a grant given us by the State to renovate the old conference hall renamed after our founder Vice-Chancellor, Bhupesh Mukherjee Memorial Hall; we are going to do that soon. We also acknowledge the book and equipment grant got some months ago which came in handy in filling up certain obvious gaps. Of course we have still a long way to go before we can claim a decent library. Our present holdings are only 53703 including 1350 gift books and 2115 bound periodicals. We cannot subscribe to very many journals either for obvious fund constraints. Anyway, we have joined the INFLIBNET and got a grant for library automation and networking. We are also going to get a VSAT from the UGC to facilitate this latter gaining us access to bigger libraries and greater storehouses of knowledge. In the meantime, let us acknowledge our debt to whoever has given us and is still giving us old books and journals. We mentioned Professors Henry Remak and Abhijit Basu of Indiana University last year who had helped collect a valuable science journal gift for us. They and their colleagues, Charles Parmenter, Milton Taylor and James Swihart have added to that gift—more old science journals have come.

Apropos of funds and positions, we are glad to record that the State has given us a few more non-teaching posts and one administrative officer's, though the total roll of the former is still quite inadequate, 119. As to the nine Ninth

Plan faculty positions given us by the UGC we hope to get the State concurrence soon. That will raise our faculty roll to 94. Surely inadequate for sixteen postgraduate departments! Our administrative officers' roll has come up to 20. And through a Ninth Plan earmarked allocation administration automation has been initiated. Now, there not being much leeway in the UGC grant of 2 crores for the whole Plan period, we are trying to reach out for the non-plan schemes, though for some of them an advanced infrastructure is necessary. Still we hope to get departmental research support under the Special Assistance Programme in one or two cases and at least one centre of specialised studies if not a master's programme in an emerging area as well. At the same time we are trying to get a regular computer centre so that the ambit of our computer literacy can fast expand. The Ninth Plan faculty that the UGC has sanctioned us and that the State is now going to give concurrence to are mostly of an interdisciplinary nature which may not only help us in resource economy but also do more justice to the relatively non-conventional focus of our disciplines.

Yet the dialectic of the non-conventional and the conventional is not easy to resolve. A bachelor's programme in an emerging non-conventional area introduced with a view to the rising needs of society may yield to a follow-up desire for a conventional master's. And this may be true of the vocational programme as well primarily initiated for entrepreneurship development and with an eye to the possible actual opportunities for work, and not for preparing the students for a follow-up master's. A rationalisation has indeed become imminent. A master's course in each and every emerging non-conventional area in each and every university of the state being out of the question, the few universities that are running it should throw open their doors. Let us try to attain that through the West Bengal State Council of Higher Education. As yet our higher education has the structure of a pyramid or what the UNESCO Commission on the education for the twenty-first century has called the 'king's way' with a continuous line of dropouts and rejects on both sides. We cannot possibly uphold the unscalability of the pyramid's top or maintain the pedigree of the 'king's way'—higher education is not a quality pursuit by a few but by many.

In fact that Commission has suggested relaxation and a necessary virtuality in our programmes so that no one is eventually left behind. All according to their abilities all right, but all according to their needs as well. This may not be entirely unrelated to Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen's insistence on universal primary education in India. I take this opportunity to once again record our joy

in the recognition he has been given for his life-long work in welfare economics. The words he spoke on social choice in answer to the civic reception in Calcutta are still ringing in my ears. And I would take this opportunity to congratulate the State Government for announcing a time-bound scheme towards UPE. After all, our existence in higher education is not utterly untouched of UPE.

At the last convocation we reported the preparations for a second engineering college under us. That has come, the College of Engineering and Management at Kolaghat. It is offering BE courses creating a complementarity to our first engineering college Haldia Institute of Technology's B.Tech. If Haldia's forte is chemical engineering, Kolaghat's is power and systems, the locational justification being obvious. At this point we are vetting affiliation applications from more professional institutions including the one from Haldia's ICARE for its second institute, that of management. And we are eagerly waiting for the first medical college of the district which is being set up at this town and the work on which is advancing at full speed. With that added to our affiliation roll, we will be multi-faculty seat of learning and training. However, our experience with extension education has not been unmixed and we may have to revamp it. At the same time the locational need of fishery education cannot possibly be left unaddressed. What our sister university in the state is doing in that respect is substantial but is perhaps not as yet enough.

Our academic calendar this year could have been disrupted by the teachers' cease-work in August-September, but our teachers came forward and offered to make up for the lost teaching in the Puja and winter recess and in colleges, where needed, by postponing the pre-final test. My gratitude to the teaching community. And my congratulations on the revised pay-scales which are in the process of being given effect to, not only for teachers but administrative officers as well. Of course with the revised pay-scales has come a mandate that we all be more accountable. If in the earlier pay-scale revision we did not do much about a code of professional ethic, this time we may have to do it, for society may not brook any unaccountability in higher education for long. Besides we really must do something about the coaching racket mushrooming around our colleges, though in my view it can be best contended by a thorough examination reform. But that is easily said than done. For the time being we need action, including remedial coaching in colleges themselves. I appeal to guardians. I appeal to college faculty and principals. Let us show the way to others as we have done in part in the case of central evaluation.

Our faculty research this year has been encouraging and I would like to congratulate those colleagues of mine who have either published papers in referred journals or written book chapters or presented papers in conferences, overseas as well as domestic, international, national and regional. I would like to make a mention of a state-level conference first and then an international conference on decentralisation and devolution organised by the State Planning Board in which Sri Anil Kumar Jana, Dr Sachinandan Sau, Dr Sankar Majumdar, Dr Susanta Kumar Chakraborty and Dr Bikash Ranjan Pati took part. Congratulations to them. Congratulations also go to those who have been granted projects by outside agencies. Our collaboration with the Centre for Women's Development Studies and Monomanian Sundaranar University has taken a shape now in the form of a pilot project granted to Dr Susanta Kumar Chakraborty and Bikash Ranjan Pati by the UNIFEM. Their work in vermicompost making by rural women of the region has already begun. Dr Debidas Ghosh has got a major research project from the UGC. The Department of Botany and Forestry has been given a grant by the Ministry of Environment for preservation of endangered plants. Other project projects are waiting consideration by funding agencies, especially the UGC and the All India Council for Technical Education. I am sure a few will come through. Our faculty have also spoken at the State Science Congress and at various popular fora, either organised by the Paschim Banga Vijnan Mancha or college NSS units or college and school celebration committees. And I take this opportunity to congratulate Dr Santosh Ghorai, our physicist Inspector of Colleges, who has got the Jnanchandra Ghosh award this year for science popularisation. I also take this opportunity to congratulate Dr Sachinandan Sau and Sri Anil Kumar Jana for editing two volumes as a follow-up of two seminars held last year in the Departments respectively of Economics with Rural Development and Political Science with Rural Administration, *Rural Development : Theories and Experiences* and *Indian Politics at the Crossroads*. Our annual research journals too have duly come out and the process has been initiated for the next number.

This year's Quit India Memorial Lecture, the fourth in the series, was given by Sri Benoy Krishna Chowdhury. He spoke on the freedom movement in its entire perspective and being a freedom fighter himself and being long involved with peasants' struggles he gave a most comprehensive account. And our third Vidyasagar Memorial Lecture was given by the eminent historian Tapan Ray Chaudhuri, formerly of Oxford. He spoke two days on the Bengalee identity in its self-exploratory aspects. This was part of a book he is writing. As to seminars and conferences held so far since the last convocation, we have

had a major event—our History Department hosted the fifteenth annual conference of the Paschim Banga Itihas Samsad participated in by a few hundred delegates. We are grateful to the Samsad for having chosen us their venue this year. We are also grateful to the Applied Mathematics Centre of Advanced Studies of Calcutta University for organising their instructional workshop for college teachers in collaboration here with our Department of Applied Mathematics with Oceanology and Computer Programming. Some seminars are under preparation by the Departments of Commerce with Farm Management, Economics with Rural Development, English and Geography and Environment Management. The Department of Political Science with Rural Administration is organising a workshop for college teachers of Political Science at Panskura Banamali College in collaboration with the college. We are also hosting three state-level syllabus workshops for the fourth paper in the three-year general degree course in the elective subjects of Economics, English and Geography organised by the State Council of Higher Education. I am glad to report that there have been some extra-mural lectures this year by experts from other institutions. The UGC visiting professorship and fellowship scheme for the Ninth Plan period has been put to effect and the students are benefitting from their teaching.

Our students too deserve congratulations. I am particularly happy to report our cultural team's performance, first at Kalyani, then Visva-Bharati and finally at Calicut. My felicitation to the members and the manager of the team, and especially to Anirban Mahapatra who won the first prize in elocution in the eastern zonal tournament and the second prize at the national, and to the group singers who won the first prize at Kalyani, second prize at Visva-Bharati and fourth prize at Calicut. I am also happy for the good impression they created as a team on their hosts at all three places. Indeed our students are our assets. And we wouldn't be there if they were not there. A vice-chancellor owes most to them. Next he owes to his colleagues in the academic departments, his administrative and other non-teaching colleagues, his fellows in the various authorities of the university, and though distant to college faculty, principals and non-teaching staff. I spoke last year of everybody's generosity ; this year I will speak of tolerance and support, for without tolerance and support a system like a university cannot function. My gratitude to the State Government and the UGC for all their help and assurance. Everytime I ran to the State I was made to believe that the university named after Vidyasagar was close to its heart. And I am grateful to our Chancellor for his benevolence and informed encouragement. When he came to this campus a few months ago he took his

time to speak to all of us and spoke of the latest needs of higher education in India. It is to his own institution that he has come again today ; I wouldn't encumber him with formal thanks. To Professor Yash Pal, our Chief Guest, my heartfelt gratitude, for at his age and in spite of his crowded schedule he has taken the trouble of coming all the way to this university located on the outskirts of a district town. When I asked him for his text he said that he would speak extempore and interact. And we all know how good an interactive speaker he is. We could not have chosen a better person today to dispell the rising fumes of bigotry and unreason. Last year Professor Irfan Habib spoke to us of the secular basis of the concept of India ; this year we look forward to Professor Yash Pal's complement to that. India cannot afford to lose reason. I welcome him to our campus.

Finally, I congratulate today's graduates, those who are here and those not-all. Congratulations to rank-holders and merit-earners as well. You all have been my students, some direct and some indirect, some near and some distant, you have all done me, your teachers and your university credit. Please keep in mind that you are the cream of this society now but by being so you are also its guardians. And you must always owe it your heart. My very best wishes to you. Sivaste panthanah santu.