



Tenth Convocation

Address by

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**15 March 2005
Saheed Pradyut Smriti Bhavan, Zilla Parishad
Paschim Medinipur 721101
West Bengal**

Our respected Chancellor, His Excellency, Shri Gopalkrishna Gandhi, respected Chief Guest, Professor Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya, esteemed recipient of Doctor of Literature (Honoris Causa), Professor Tapas Majumdar, honoured recipient of Doctor of Science (Honoris Causa) Degree, Professor Amal Kumar Raychaudhuri, honourable members of the Court and the Executive Council of our University, Faculty members and other members of the University community, recipients of degrees, medals and prizes, distinguished guests, media representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I deem it as my great privilege to extend my hearty and cordial welcome to all of you to this Tenth Convocation of our beloved University on behalf of Vidyasagar University and also on my own behalf.

I am particularly grateful to our Chancellor, Honourable Shri Gopalkrishna Gandhi, who bears the rich heritage of our glorious freedom struggle but who himself is also an able administrator and a prolific writer, for having kindly accepted our invitation to preside over this Convocation today. Sir, we are greatly honoured by your first visit to this University, a University which is young in age but very great in potentials and also by your first visit to the district and town of Midnapore, a district which occupies a golden place in the history of freedom struggle of our country.

I extend, on behalf of the University, a special welcome to Professor Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya, a renowned scholar, intellectual and a well known authority on Mahatma Gandhi and an Emeritus Professor of Jadavpur University, for his readily agreeing to address the Convocation. Having been selected both for the IAS and IFS in 1955 and having opted for the IFS and continuing there for a few years, Prof. Bandyopadhyaya joined the academics and reached the highest academic position, established himself as a true intellectual. He has been a life long crusader against racial hatred and religious fundamentalism and obscurantism.

This year the Executive Council and the Court have unanimously recommended, and the Honourable Chancellor has duly assented, to confer the Degree of Doctor of Literature (Honoris Causa) on Professor Tapas Majumdar, an eminent economist, who has also made significant contribution on policy planning, and the Degree of Doctor of Science (Honoris Causa) on Professor Amal Kumar Raychaudhuri, who is an eminent Physicist and who has nurtured generations of students and scholars in the discipline of Physics, particularly in Cosmology and Astrophysics. The University feels profusely proud and honoured to have these distinguished personalities on this auspicious day of Convocation. It is also my pleasure to welcome all my previous Vice-Chancellors present here, other distinguished guests and the media persons who have taken all the trouble to join us on this happy occasion.

Since the holding of the last Convocation in April 2004, the University has recorded significant progress in academic pursuits through its various

programmes of teaching, research and extension activities. Within this period, the University has awarded 15 Ph.D. Degrees to the candidates of which 12 are in Science subjects and 03 are in Humanities and Commerce subjects. Steps have been initiated to amend the Ph.D. rules and regulations so as to correspond them to changing situation. Master Degrees have been awarded to 4134 candidates belonging to 27 different subjects, both in the regular mode and in the Distance Education mode.

I am also delighted to mention that within this period two Post-graduate Courses, viz., Microbiology and Electronics, have been given separate Departmental status and one Diploma Course, viz., Post-graduate Diploma in Laboratory Technology has been converted into Master's Course as we have introduced Master in Laboratory Technology from this year. In our University affiliated Institute of Management Technology at Ghaziabad, four existing Diploma Courses have been converted into Master's Courses, the most notable of them being the introduction of MBA Course. Through our Distance Education Centre, we have also introduced from this year M.Sc. Course in Applied Mathematics. The Vidyasagar School of Social Work, Kolkata, which is affiliated to our University, has also been allowed to open from this year PG Diploma in Psychological Counselling.

I am also glad to inform you that, based on the recommendation of the Expert Committee, the Executive Council and the Court have decided to open Sociology and Sanskrit and these two subjects will be opened with effect from the academic session 2005-2006.

Apart from this, our University has granted permanent affiliation to Midnapore Law College and Haldia Law College to run the 3 years' and 5 years' LL.B. Courses, duly approved by the Bar Council of India. Also, with the Bar Council's approval, affiliation has been granted to Sarsuna Law College, Kolkata to open 3 years' LL.B. Course from this year. It is clear that the University has been doing its best to provide diversified course structures to meet the diversified needs and demands of the students.

The Under-graduate Colleges affiliated to our University have established their credentials in the academic field. Midnapore College has gained the unique distinction of being accredited 'A+' status by the NAAC Peer Team. It must be mentioned here that Midnapore College is the first College in West Bengal to have achieved this distinction. Two other Colleges, viz., Raja N. L. Khan Women's College and Panskura Banamali College have been awarded 'A' Grade by NAAC - these are also very creditable achievements. While congratulating these Colleges for their achievements, I think that other Colleges will feel enthused by their examples and will come forward for quality assessment.

Another very significant development has been that four Under-graduate Colleges have been allowed to open PG Courses in their Colleges in Physics, Chemistry, Zoology and Computer Science. Three of them have

already introduced the Courses. With this PG affiliation given to Under-graduate Colleges, the University has endeavoured to expand the opportunities for higher studies. It will not be out of place to mention here that of the Colleges which have thus been allowed, all the three above mentioned NAAC accredited Colleges are there.

In order to maximise the academic output of the Under-graduate Colleges, the University has introduced academic calendar which is to be uniformly acceptable to all the Colleges and has also introduced academic auditing system in all the Colleges. Colleges have been asked to submit relevant data before the University which the University will regularly monitor and, if necessary, take corrective action. Effective from this year, a step towards decentralization of evaluation system has also been taken in the sense that in some of the subjects, scripts will be examined on a zonal basis covering a cluster of Colleges.

The Post-graduate Departments of the University have been regularly pursuing the goal of teaching and research despite "the constraints of manpower, equipment, library, working space and financial constraints" as admitted by the UGC 10th Plan Visiting Committee. Financial supports for ongoing and new research programmes are being received by our Departments regularly. In the current year, the following Departments have received assistance from the FIST Programme. These are : Chemistry and Chemical Technology - Rs. 32 Lakhs, Human Physiology with Community Health - Rs. 25.5 Lakhs, Remote Sensing and GIS - Rs. 18 Lakhs and Zoology - Rs. 17.5 Lakhs.

Similarly, the Department of Botany and Forestry has been engaged in implementing the programme of Eastern Region Networking on Joint Forest Management funded by the Society for Promotion of Wasteland Development (SPWD) - its activities cover not only West Bengal but also the adjoining states of Orissa and Jharkhand.

The R & D activities of some of our individual teachers of some of the Departments have also been noteworthy. The Projects of the following teachers have been sanctioned within this year : Dr. Srutinath Chakraborty (UGC Rs. 5.66 Lakhs), Dr. Syed Sirajul Islam (UGC Rs. 7.72 Lakhs), Dr. Braja Gopal Bag (DST and CSIR Projects of Rs. 9.6 Lakhs and Rs. 8.5 Lakhs respectively), Dr. Kaushik Sankar Bose (UGC Rs. 4.29 Lakhs) and Dr. Prakash Chandra Dhara (Rs. 5.04 Lakhs). I take this opportunity to congratulate all these teachers and urge upon others to be proactive in bringing external research support.

Individual achievements of some of our teachers are also noteworthy. Thus Dr. Prakash Chandra Dhara of the Dept. of Human Physiology with Community Health has obtained a Design Registration from the Patent Office of the Government of India on one of his designs. Dr. Syed Sirajul Islam's research findings on a certain product have also been submitted for patenting

and the NRDC, a GOI enterprise under DST, is providing all infrastructural assistance in this respect. Sri Partha Bandyopadhyay, a Ph.D. Scholar in the Department of Zoology, has obtained Honorary Fellowships from the 'Society for Sciences' and also from the 'Society of Life Sciences'.

A good number of National level and State level Seminars have been organised by different teaching Departments and associations of staff members. We can particularly mention here a State level Seminar to observe the "Year of Scientific Awareness, 2004" jointly organised by the University and the DST, Government of West Bengal. The teaching Departments have also been benefited by the Special Lecture Programme addressed by the distinguished Visiting Professors / Fellows. The members of the teaching community and some officers of the University have also participated within this period in various national and international Seminars, Workshops and Symposia. International Conferences held in countries like Hong Kong, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh have been participated by Dr. Susanta Kumar Chakraborty, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Patra, Dr. Sachinandan Sau, Dr. Manoranjan Maiti and Dr. Juran Krishna Sarkhel. Your Vice-Chancellor had also gone abroad to participate in International Conferences in China and Bangladesh on invitation from them.

In addition to Development Grant of Rs. 3 Crores during the Xth Plan, UGC has also provided during the Xth Plan Period an Instrumentation Maintenance Facility (IMF) with a financial assistance of Rs. 3.71 Lakhs and a recurrent INFONET Grant of Rs. 4.38 Lakhs during this year. Construction work for extension of buildings for academic purpose has been going on. There have been some complications in starting work for the development of Sports Complex which has been receiving our attention. Also, a decision has been taken to construct another Science Building Block, another Teachers' Hostel Building and a full-fledged auditorium complex for the University. We hope to start work on these Projects within this year. It is also gratifying to note that our University Guest House building has finally been made operational after lying idle for a couple of years. Necessary action has also been taken to install a nine-feet bronze statue of Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar very soon.

In our effort to implement the UGC-INFONET Programme, we have already developed LAN for our whole campus and an Internet connectivity of 256 kbps BBVSAT which, we hope, will soon be converted into 512 kbps. As a result, we will stay interconnected with other institutions for sharing centralized and other sharable resources. E-journal consortia has been formed under this programme through which centrally subscribed academic and professional journals are being accessed to. An amount of Rs. 9.5 Lakhs had been received from the UGC for this purpose.

The NSS Unit of the University has been extending outreach activities from the campus to the community. With an effective strength of 11,295 volunteers enrolled through 112 units, our NSS Cell has been able to organise

50 special camping programmes in addition to undertaking normal programmes like awareness about AIDS and HIV diseases, Pulse Polio, social forestry, scientific awareness, environmental protection, literacy, hygiene and health related programmes. Our NSS volunteers have donated Rs. 71,000.00 to the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund for the Tsunami victims. I am also happy to note that this year two of our students from NSS represented the University in the Republic Day Parade at New Delhi and they have been acclaimed officially for their performance.

Our University community has not lagged behind in the cultural activities too. The cultural team has secured good ranking in the East Zone Inter-Varsity Youth Festival in 2004 on such items as clay-modelling, light vocal (solo) and classical dance. One of our students secured second position in the National Cultural Programme also held last year.

Like previous years, our University had in this year too organized 19th Inter-collegiate and PG Athletic Meet, in which 29 Colleges and the University PG Team participated. Our Football and Table Tennis Team also regularly participate in various competitions held both at the national and state levels.

In order to cope with the ever-increasing needs of the users, our University Library had procured SOUL (Software for University Libraries) package developed by INFLIBNET. In the processing unit, books are catalogued as indicated in the worksheet provided by SOUL Package. The Library has now a collection of about 65 thousand books, 104 regularly subscribed Journals and 120 Ph.D. Theses. All Library users can now avail the online search service through OPAC. Internet and e-mail services are too provided to the users of the Central Library. With the introduction of Campus LAN and the availability of 256 kbps, the quality and speed of Internet connectivity will definitely improve the situation from a qualitative point of view.

Friends, as we have entered into a new millennium, the demands on, and the expectations from, education in general, and higher education in particular, has tremendously increased. Developed countries of the West solved the problem of quantitative expansion of education much earlier so that they got enough space to concentrate on the issue of quality. But in our country, the task of quantitative expansion and qualitative improvement has to be taken up simultaneously. Entry into the GATS regime implies that we have to compete internationally on even terms. In the GATS regime, academic institutions or other education providers would be free to export and import degree, diploma programme with minimal restrictions and can set up educational and training programmes in any country of the world through branches, franchisee, distance and on-line learning technologies without any control.

To take up the challenge at the level of higher education in India would mean (1) immediate implementation of quality assurance measures

including ensuring adequately equipped faculty so that they can take up the twin challenge of dissemination of existing knowledge and creation of new knowledge; (2) diversification of educational opportunities so that our own students can be exposed to the new and expanding frontiers of knowledge; (3) a vast improvement in the infrastructural facilities and making concerted efforts to reap the benefits of ICT in the field of higher education. The challenge has to be taken up on an immediate basis as, unlike the developed countries, we do not have any breathing space to build up.

The gigantic nature of the task can be understood in view of the fact that the educational edifice in India is one of the largest ones in the world. The number of students, which has exceeded 200 millions, is more than the total population of united Germany, England and Canada, taken together. Yet we have an enrolment pattern of only about 7 p.c. in higher education as compared to 12 p.c. in Brazil or 19 p.c. in Thailand, not to speak of the ratio prevalent in the developed countries. To increase this number in the realm of higher education and to ensure some minimum quality assurance measures would imply deployment of huge resource in the field of higher education.

It will not be out of place to mention here some disturbing educational outlay data from the Indian situation. The per capita outlay for students declined from Rs. 7676.00 in 1993-'94 to Rs. 5873.00 in 2001-'02. In a situation of heavy dependence of higher education on government finances, the higher education scenario has been affected by increasing financial constraints of the government and increasing shift of emphasis from higher education to elementary education. In the Fifth five year Plan, higher education received 20% of total expenditure on education, whereas in the Ninth Plan, this figure was down to 10%. Whereas in 1960-'61, the expenditure ratio between school education on the one hand and higher education on the other was 53.97 and 46.03 respectively, the same ratio declined to 09.77 and 09.23 respectively in the year 2001-'02. UGC assistance to State Universities has been very meagre but there is a wide regional imbalance in the distribution of even this meagre grant. Region wise UGC funding to State Universities shows that whereas Northern and Southern States received 32.79 p.c. and 33.98 p.c. respectively in 2001-'02, in the same year the Eastern and North-eastern States received only 10.62 p.c. and 3.35 p.c.

It is true that the primary and secondary education has a great significance in the development of a nation. However, this does not mean that higher education is to be treated as a 'non-merit good' or that the government would abdicate its role and responsibility in the field of higher education. In addition to increasing literacy rates in the country, the government should aim at producing nation-builders in the form of scientists, managers, researchers, engineers etc. Quality of life depends on the ability of the institutions of higher learning to ensure the availability of competent and capable work force. The task force constituted by World Bank and UNESCO

during 2000 has observed that higher education helps increase wage and productivity that directly enrich individual and society.

Two things come out of this submission. First, the government must play a lead role in financing higher education institutions so that these institutions can compete on a level playing field. But, secondly, this gigantic task cannot be addressed by government alone. So there is an urgent need for opening higher education for private participation. In the realm of higher education financing, it is not public versus private but the two must play the role of supplementing each other. According to Human Development Report 2001, India ranks 104th with respect to the share of public expenditure on education in GNP among 143 countries. This grim picture suggests that private financing must be allowed entry in the field of higher education. The only precondition is that it must not be an unregulated entry. The function of monitoring and supervising, prioritization and channelization must be in the hands of public bodies like the UGC or the AICTE or the NCTE. The question is are they playing their roles effectively? Had the UGC been alert and effective, the incredible phenomenon of creating as many as 112 private Universities within a short space of one year in the newly created State of Chhattisgarh, would not have happened. So private finance is necessary, but it must not be at the cost of higher education - but in order to fulfil the objectives of higher education.

Within a short span of last one or two decades, there has occurred a so-called 'paradigm shift' in higher education. Some of the important components of this 'paradigm shift' are that higher education has been changing its character from national to global education, from a State sponsored system to an open market economy, from liberal education oriented to market oriented education, from a class room oriented system to a system of virtual education, from teacher-centric to learner-centric and from one time education to life long education. We may not be in full agreement with one or another of these components, but we cannot deny the fact that these are parts of the global trends in higher education. We must respond to these forces of change and reorient our structure and our mind set to meet the requirements of the new situation.

Before I conclude, I must call upon my young recipients of doctorate degrees and other distinctions to keep this always in your minds that you are the bearers of the high cultural tradition of the nation. You must prove yourselves befitting to your academic degrees to face the challenges of the larger society with boldness and determination. Society has played its role in helping you to build up, it is time for you to acknowledge your indebtedness and contribute your mite to the nation building process. As it has been stated, "Your University credentials are only the 'Passport' to life, but you must earn your 'Visa' of success with a pledge to serve the country." The University, as your alma mater, will always be by your side. All my best wishes are with you.

Once again, I convey my deepest regards and thanks to all those who have assembled here to make the Tenth Convocation of this young University a grand success.

Thank you for your patient hearing.