

Our respected Chancellor His Excellency, Shri Gopalkrishna Gandhi, Hon'ble Chief Guest, Professor Damodar Acharya, who is currently the Chairman of All India Council for Technical Education, esteemed recipient of Doctor of Literature (Honoris Causa), Professor Bipan Chandra, hon'ble recipient of Doctor of Science (Honoris Causa) Degree, Professor Asima Chatterjee, who could not be present today because of her advanced age, hon'ble members of the Court and the Executive Council of our University, Faculty members, Officers and other staff members of the University community, recipients of degrees, medals and prizes, distinguished guests, media representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen.

With great pleasure I welcome you all to this Eleventh Convocation of our beloved University on behalf of Vidyasagar University and also on my own behalf.

The Convocation ceremony is being observed in the backdrop of the Silver Jubilee Year of the University in 2006. We have decided to observe the occasion with suitable pomp and grandeur and with an adequate perspective planning and through which we will rededicate ourselves to the goal of spreading modern education while ensuring adequate standard and quality.

I express my sincere gratitude to our Chancellor, Hon'ble Shri Gopalkrishna Gandhi, who has impressed all of us within this short stint of his tenure by his sense of commitment and sincerity, for having kindly accepted our invitation to preside over the Convocation today. Sir, we are greatly honoured by your august presence in this University and on behalf of the entire University community, I assure you Sir that the University while remaining firmly committed in carrying the tradition of Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, who waged a relentless struggle against illiteracy, obsolete social customs and against social discriminations, will be making all efforts to spread scientific and modern education without losing sight of the contextuality and specificity of the area where the University is located.

I extend, on behalf of the University, a very special welcome to Professor Damodar Acharya, the Chairman of the AICTE, who after completing an illustrious academic career in our neighbouring academic giant of IIT, Kharagpur, joined as Vice-Chancellor of Biju Patnaik University of Technology, Rourkela where, within his short period of stay, he had ensured creditable academic and research overhauling in that Institution and now, as Chairman of AICTE, he is trying to set new directions for this Body which is the all India apex body for coordinating and ensuring high standards in technical and engineering education in our country.

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 Bipan Chandra, an

eminent historian, who has been a life long crusader in finding out the roots of India's syncretic tradition in India's history, culture and tradition and the Degree of Doctor of Science (Honoris Causa) on Professor Mrs. Asima Chatterjee who has had a long and distinguished teaching and research career in organic chemistry and who has enthused generations of research scholars in the field of organic chemistry. The University feels highly privileged to honour these two outstanding personalities on this auspicious day of the 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.

The last (Tenth) Convocation of our University was held on 15 March 2005. Steady progress has since been made in different segments of teaching, research and extension activities of our University. Thus in the current academic session (2005-2006) the University has awarded 32 Ph.D. degrees of which 23 are in Science faculty, and 09 in Humanities and Social Sciences. It is gratifying to note in this connection that we have completely revised the Ph.D. Rules and Regulations after an extensive process of dialogue at the faculty level and the new Regulations are definitely an improvement on the old one. In the last session, Master degrees in different subjects have been awarded to 4949 candidates, both in the regular and distance education modes. Undergraduate degrees have also been awarded to 11,491 candidates belonging to both Honours and General Courses.

In the current session three new PG departments have started their teaching and research activities. The departments are: Sociology, Sanskrit, and Bio-medical Laboratory Science and Management. Affiliation has been extended to Vidyasagar Institute of Health for conducting PG Diploma Course in Hospital Management, and to Institute of Engineering & Management, Salt Lake, Kolkata, for introducing a three-year MBA Course in the Distance Mode with effect from the current session (2005-2006). The Department of Bio-medical Laboratory Science and Management is going to start a condensed MLT Course for the PGDLT students of the University. Thus keeping an eye to the requirements of the time, our University has ventured so far quite successfully to provide diversified course structures.

From the next academic session, we propose to introduce MBA Course within our University itself for our regular students. Necessary preparations are being made and with the opening of this course, a long felt need of our students can be met. The Department of Library and Information Science will similarly launch a 2-year PG Diploma Course in Library Automation, Networking and Digitalization with effect from the next session. Keeping in mind the need of a diversified course structure, a Diploma Course on Mass Communication and

Videography is also being opened within the campus of the University which will provide a new area for opening up for our students.

At the undergraduate level, affiliation has been granted to Kharagpur College to initiate a two-year PG Course in Bengali from this session. Two new Colleges have also been opened viz. Sukumar Sengupta Mahavidyalaya (for conducting general degree course), and Santal Bidroha Sardha Satabarshiki Mahavidyalaya (for offering both Honours and General Courses) from the current session. Our University has also granted affiliation to two new Teachers' Training Colleges viz. Kabi Sukanta Secondary Teachers' Training College, and Ratulia Secondary Teachers' Training College, for carrying out B.Ed. Courses from this session (2005-2006).

Our undergraduate Colleges have achieved recognition for their commendable activities in the field of education. The NAAC Peer Team's accreditation with some of these Colleges bear testimony to this fact. Thus in the last one year, Panskura Banamali College has been accredited with "A" status by the NAAC Peer Team, while Rabindra Satabarshiki Mahavidyalaya of Ghatal, and Mahishadal Girls' College affiliated to our University, with "B++" and "B" status respectively.

The postgraduate departments of our University have been widely recognized for its excellent achievements in the field of R & D. More and more research grants have been pouring in for carrying out research activities through major and minor research projects awarded by such institutions as UGC, DST, WBPCB, CSIR, ICMR and others. The departments which have received such type of research project grants are: History (Maulana A. K. Azad Institute of Asian Studies: Rs. 2 lakhs); Commerce with Farm Management (Professor Arindam Gupta: UGC: Rs. 1.72 lakhs); Chemistry and Chemical Technology (Dr. Sirajul Islam: UGC: Rs. 7.72 lakhs); Bio-medical Laboratory Science and Management (Dr. Debidas Ghosh: UGC: Rs. 15.5 lakhs); Human Physiology with Community Health (Dr. Prakash Chandra Dhara: UGC: Rs. 3.45 lakhs and CSIR: Rs. 0.73 lakh; Professor Somenath Roy: DST: Rs. 4 lakhs); Anthropology (Dr. Kaushik Sankar Bose: ICMR: Rs. 7.85 lakhs, and DST: Rs. 2.78 lakhs); Zoology (Professor Susanta Kumar Chakraborty: WBPCB: Rs. 4.30 lakhs [for three projects]); and Applied Mathematics with Oceanology and Computer Programming (Dr. Madhumangal Pal: DST: Rs. 1.92 lakh).

It is delightful to note that the UGC has after a gap of three years, finally released in last August the last instalment of its grant under the IX Plan to our Gandhian Studies Centre for reviving its activities. Since August 2005 the Centre has been able to organize various programmes under its auspices. It has conducted the second Six-months' Certificate Course on Gandhian Thought, the examination of which is scheduled to be held on and from 22 March 2006. A

three-day State-level Winter Study Camp on "Gandhian Ideas and Movements" was held during 21-23 January 2006. In addition to the PG students of our University, students of Rabindra Bharati University, University of Kalyani and University of Burdwan attended the Camp. The Centre has also organized a three-day State-level Seminar on "Rural Reorganization: Gandhian Alternatives" during 21-23 February 2006. The Seminar was sponsored by the Khadi and Village Industries Commission, Government of India. It was attended by both the Gandhian activists all over South Bengal and the academics of Vidyasagar University. Besides, a few occasional lectures were delivered by academicians and Gandhian activists alike. Those lectures are now ready for publication as Occasional Papers of the Centre. The Centre has been assured of quick release of grant under the X Plan Period, by the UGC.

Other important landmarks of the academic programme of the University has been opening of a Foundation Course in Human Rights and Values in Education for the undergraduate students of Political Science. The grant for conducting this Course has been sanctioned in the X Plan Period by the UGC in favour of the Department of Political Science with Rural Administration of our University. On the other hand, the Department of Geography and Environment Management and Remote Sensing & GIS has set up a Digital Image Processing and Geographic Information System Laboratory. This is for the first time in West Bengal that such a Lab has been set up.

The Department of Microbiology will be providing shortly research and extension work facilities to the MSV Laboratories, Panskura which is engaged in export oriented Bio-technological projects. The University is going to sign an MOU with them.

No academic community can thrive only by limiting its activities within the confines of teaching and research. Continuous lively intellectual interaction with other academic institutions is indeed the hallmark of a University to be reckoned with. In fact, our PG departments have, to that end, organized Seminars, Conferences and Workshop dealing with various contemporary issues. They have no doubt been able to make their marks in this respect. Quite a good number of such academic activities have been carried out in the current academic session. Some of them are worth mentioning: three-day national seminar on "World of Physics 2005: Journey with a Glorious Past" (Department of Physics and Technophysics); two-day state-level seminar on "Terrorism: National and International Perspectives" (Department of Political Science with Rural Administration); three-day national seminar on "Bio-medical Laboratory Science" (Department of Bio-medical Laboratory Science and Management in collaboration with Vidyasagar Institute of Health, Rangamati); two-day national seminar on "Frontiers of Chemical Sciences" (Department of Chemistry and Chemical Technology); one-day state-level seminar on "Contextualising Caste"

(Department of Sociology); one-day national seminar on "Corporate Performance; Measurement and Management" (Department of Commerce with Farm Management); one-day seminar on "Future Trends in Electronics" (Department of Electronics). An eight-day national workshop on "Ornamental Fish Breeding and Culture" was also organized by the Department of Aquaculture Management and Technology.

The Officers' Association (VUOA) and the Teachers' Association (VUTA) have also organized one-day national seminars on "Role of UGC for the development of University and Colleges", and "Privatization of Education in India" respectively.

Refresher Courses were also organized by the Departments of Bengali (Theme: "Rabindranath: Samay O Sahitya"), Economics with Rural Development (Theme: "Decentralization, Planning and Participatory Development") and Philosophy and the Life-World (Theme: "Ethics and Social Philosophy") in the current session (2005-2006).

The personal academic feats of our PG teachers have also been commendable. Shri Abhijit Sinha, one of the youngest Lecturers of our University, of the Department of Commerce with Farm Management, has been awarded Arabinda Banerjee Silver Medal by the Indian Institute of Social Welfare and Business Management of Kolkata, for standing Second in order of merit in the MBA examination 2004. Dr. Jaidev Maity, Lecturer, Department of Aquaculture Management and Technology (Zoology) has been nominated for the Junior Scientist of the Year Award 2005 by the National Environmental Science Academy, New Delhi. Dr. Braja Gopal Bag of the Department of Chemistry and Chemical Technology has been appointed as the Visiting Scientist (Honorary) at the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science, Jadavpur.

Some of our teachers, on the other hand, represented our University in various International Seminars/Conferences. Professor Rajat Kanti Das and Dr. Abhijit Guha of the Department of Anthropology presented their Papers at the International Seminar on "Integrating Planning Against Risk" at Bangkok during 17-18 September 2005, organized by the Centre for Development Studies, University of Wales, Swansea, UK. Smt. Priyanka Halder of the Department of Zoology participated in the South Asian Fisheries Forum at Penang, Malaysia during 24-25 September of the last year. Dr. Alok Bhattacharya of the Department of Botany and Forestry attended the Third International Botanical Conference held at Dhaka, Bangladesh, during 9-11 December 2005.

The success of our students are also noteworthy. Every year a large section of them qualify for UGC, CSIR, NET and SLET examinations. The achievements of the students of the Department of Chemistry and Chemical

Technology in this academic session are particularly worth mentioning. In the last UGC/CSIR/NET examinations (2005) 34 students of this department have qualified for screening. About 95% of the students in the Department of Computer Science have been employed last year in various leading software development farms like TCS, CTS, Wipro, IBM, Satyam, Government sector. Some of them are now engaged in various research institutes like ISI, Kolkata, IIT, Kharagpur and Jadavpur University. In the Department of Aquaculture Management and Technology 7 students have been screened for placement while 16 others for training, through Campus interview by five leading agriculture-based companies. Those who have been selected for training, would get placement after the final result of the Part-II M. Sc. examination 2006.

In the current academic session the Directorate of Distance Education (DDE) has introduced two postgraduate courses in Sanskrit and Chemistry. Recently, the Distance Education Council (DEC) visited our University. The DEC Visiting Team has very highly appreciated the performance of our Distance Education Centre and has sanctioned a grant of Rs. 25 lakhs. We are trying our best to address two major problems in the functioning of our Distance Education Centre, viz. timely holding of examinations and publication of results and secondly, ensuring the availability of self-instructional Materials (SIM) to our students.

Our NSS units have been carrying out their outreach activities as usual. This year (April 2005 – March 2006) 108 out of 120 units could be activated involving 10,998 volunteers (male: 7472, female: 3526). The NSS Cell of the University has been able to organize 49 Special Camping Programmes during the period between April and December 2005, in addition to undertaking some routine activities dealing with campaigns against AIDS and HIV, campaigns for Immunization and Pulse Polio, Social Forestry, Scientific Awareness, Environment Protection, Literacy and other Health and Hygiene promotion activities. Special emphasis was however laid on the development of scientific and rational attitude in the minds of youth through undertaking science-oriented programmes. The devotion of the student-volunteers to the NSS activities is exemplary. During the flood in last October they rendered praiseworthy services to the flood-stricken people of Purba Medinipur. They have also donated 389 units of blood during the last nine months. A female student volunteer has been selected for the International Youth Meet to be held at Japan. This is for the first time that a student volunteer of this University is going to join an international meet. The NAAC Peer Team Visiting different Colleges have appreciated the performances of the NSS units at respective Colleges under our University.

In the social service sector, the Medical Unit of our University has organized a Health Check-up Programme for the students of the University. In

addition a Health Check-up Awareness Programme has started since 30 January 2006.

So far as the development works are concerned, Academic Buildings of the University have been getting extended. It is enlightening to note that the University has at last been able to install a nine-foot bronze statue of Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar in the campus of the University. The construction work for building a Sports Complex has started and it has been in progress. The multipurpose sports ground has finally been prepared and it will be made available for use very soon. To accommodate the increasing demand for opening new Science Departments and the expansion of the capacities of the existing departments, an entire new Science Building will be constructed. The Building will be named as Einstein Building, as it has been envisaged in the centenary year of the momentous discoveries by Einstein in the field of Science. A 24 Quarter residential Block for our teachers and officers is also being constructed to cope with the increasing demand for campus living. Within the last year, expansion of the capacities of the Girls' Hostel, Boys' Hostel and the University Library have also been made.

As far as Students' amenities and co-curricular activities are concerned, the University has opened a 'Placement Cell' for the students. The Cell is working closely with the NIVL for training and camping of the students.

The University organized within the last year an East Zone Inter University Debate Contest on HIV/AIDS sponsored by AIU/NACO from September 20 to 23 2005. 19 Universities from East Zone participated in the said debate contest and our University won the first position. Our University also participated in the Inter-Varsity National Debate Contest at the Agricultural University, Bangalore from 22-24 November 2005 and our students ranked 3rd in the National Debate Contest. Our students also won 2nd position in the East Zone Inter University Quiz Contest on HIV/AIDS at Jadavpur University from 15-17 September 2005.

Inter Collegiate and PG Cultural meet is being held every year for selection of representatives for the East Zone Inter Varsity Youth Festival. The Cultural Meet was held on 10th September 2005 in the campus. The cultural team of Vidyasagar University succeeded in four cultural events at the East Zone Inter Varsity Youth Festival held in NEHU, Shillong from 24-28 October 2005. The University also organized 'One Act Play' Competition on 9th and 10th December 2005. Students from different Schools and Colleges within the District participated in the said Programme.

Hon'ble Chancellor Sir and friends, the journey of the Indian education system during the last sixty years after independence has been long, arduous and uneven. Though the educational edifice in India is one of the largest ones in

the world, yet, considering the tremendous demand on the system, the opportunities are still very limited. Only 7% of the age cohorts receive the benefits of higher education in our country compared to well over 50% in many of the developed countries of the west. The challenge is two fold. Quantitative expansion has to be ensured so that opportunities can be distributed over a wider social base. But, along with quantitative expansion, the issues of quality and excellence in higher education have also to be addressed. This requires a huge investment in the educational sector for ensuring qualitative infrastructural support.

It is here that we notice a declining support to education in general and higher education in particular on the part of the government. The per capita outlay for students declined from Rs. 7676.00 in 1993-'94 to Rs. 5873.00 in 2001-'02. There has been an increasing shift in emphasis from higher education to elementary education. While the primacy of elementary education is undoubtedly true, a developing country like India can ignore the cause of higher education only at its own peril. 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 90.77% and 09.23% respectively in the year 2001-'02. To worsen this situation, there is a huge regional imbalance in distributing this meagre amount to many state Universities.

Faced with this cash crunch situation, many are offering privatization of higher education as an acceptable solution. This sounds logical in the face of resource constraints. But is privatization the only solution and is it a panacea? On the other hand, it is being proved that the private sector would focus attention and resources only where there is an economic and business angle and neglect the non-utilitarian aspects of liberal arts, humanities etc. But the whole genesis of the University system was due to the emphasis on the study of humanities, liberal arts, history, society, economy etc. In a country like that of ours, with poverty and illiteracy remaining very high, continued and increasing public support towards the cause of education is a must.

The other big challenge facing the Indian education system is that of inequity in educational development. A truncated base in terms of educational achievement tends to breed further inequity not only in terms of education but also in terms of overall prosperity. Experience shows that the small elite which has already received education manages to crave for much more than its fair share of the developmental inputs. In such an inequitable system, the heavy burden of the uneducated masses saps the developmental potential of the country.

Operating within this over all inequitous framework, the gender and caste bias among the enrolled students in the higher educational sector complicates the situation further. This bias will become clear if we analyse the enrolment pattern in our University at the PG level. In the year 2005-'06, the total number of enrolled PG students in the 11 Humanities and Social Science subjects were 855 whereas the number of enrolled students in 15 Science subjects were 530. An analysis of gender and caste composition of these enrolled students will show that more males than females were interested in Science subjects; more general caste male students than SC or ST students were to be found in 'mainstream' Science subjects. Female students are found more in Arts subjects or among the Science subjects, in the 'soft' Science subjects. Among the total of 530 Science students, there are only 25 SC female students – 15 of them being in Botany and Zoology alone - and only 4 ST male students and 4 ST female students are to be found. And if we analyse the gender and caste composition of some of our high fees 'modern' subjects like MCA, Aquaculture Management and Technology, Electronics, Computer Science, Microbiology and Remote Sensing, the gender and caste bias of the enrolled students in these subjects will become more clear. Among the general caste students, there are 100 male students whereas the number of female students is only 33 in these subjects. There are altogether 5 SC students (M-3, F-2) and 1 ST female student in all these subjects taken together. If this is the situation in a University like ours which is situated in a rural and a relatively backward area where the students in general come from a relatively poor socio-economic background, one can easily imagine the situation of such skewed distribution of the student community in Universities situated in metropolitan areas. It seems that, instead of acting as leveller and equalizer, our education system is reinforcing the existing lines of social division.

It is a truism to say that the contours of the education system in any country are not shaped only by the actions within the education sector. As it has been aptly said, 'Progress in education is determined as much by efforts within the education sector as by factors for economic growth, agricultural development and land reforms, social reconstruction processes, provision of health and many other social and cultural factors'.

But even admitting the relevance of the over-all structural features, we, who function within the education system itself, have the obligation to make the system relevant and contextual and to ensure its quality in a competitive environment. The central focus of our endeavours has to be the students and the teaching-learning environment. The thing which should be uppermost in our minds should be the kind of man we intend to produce from our institutions of higher learning. We are getting the human raw materials, the quality of our product depends upon our sincerity and sense of commitment.

Before I conclude, I extend my warm welcome to all the recipients of Degrees and distinctions at today's ceremonial function. Do please remember the efforts of the Society and the Institution in helping you to develop your potentialities. You must prove yourself befitting to your academic degrees to face the challenges of the larger society with courage and determination. Your University bears through you the glorious legacy of Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar who was a life long crusader fighting for justice and equality, for modernity and humanitarianism. 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 Eleventh Convocation of this young University a grand success.

Thank you all.
