

Honourable Chancellor Sir, Sri Gopalkrishna Gandhi, our respected Chief Guest Professor Amiya Kumar Bagchi, my predecessor Vice-Chancellors, esteemed recipients of Doctor of Literature (Honoris Causa) Degree, Professor U. R. Anantha Murthy, the former President of Sahitya Akademi and Sri Sunil Gangopadhyay, the President of Sahitya Akademi and noted litterateur, respected recipient of Doctor of Science (Honoris Causa) Degree, Professor Asis Datta, the noted Scientist in the field of Molecular Biology, Deans of Faculties, members of the Court and the Executive Council of the University, Faculty members, Officers and other Staff members of the University, Principals of Colleges, recipients of Degrees, Medals and Prizes, distinguished guests, representatives from the media, research scholars, students, ladies and gentlemen.

I am extremely happy to welcome you all to this Thirteenth Convocation of this University for the year 2008. I am particularly grateful to our Honourable Chancellor, Sri Gopalkrishna Gandhi, for kindly consenting to preside over this Convocation. Sir, on behalf of the University community, I welcome you most sincerely and cordially.

We are grateful to Professor Amiya Kumar Bagchi for consenting to be the Guest Speaker at this Convocation. Professor Bagchi is a leading Economist and an educationist who has earned the reputation for his scholarly contribution and for his forthright opinion on the critical issues of contemporary society. Author of so many books and articles, Professor Bagchi is now acting as Director of Institute of Development Studies Kolkata which is fast developing as a leading centre of Research in the field of social sciences. He had a brilliant academic and research career and had taught, researched and guided research in many institutions and Universities including Presidency College, University of Cambridge, University of Bristol, Cornell University, Trent University, Roskilde University and a few others. Honorary Doctorate Degrees have been awarded to him by three Universities. He was also awarded Padma Shree by the Government of India in 2005. We are especially delighted to welcome him in our midst.

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 U. R. Anantha Murthy, Chairman, Film and Television Institute of India, Pune, who has made remarkable contribution in the literature of Kannada language, was President of the National Book Trust and the President of the Sahitya Akademi and who was earlier the Vice-Chancellor of Mahatma Gandhi University in Kottayam and acted as a Visiting Professor in many renowned Indian and foreign Universities; 2) Sri Sunil Gangopadhyay who has become a legendary figure in Bengali literature for his creative talent in diverse fields, especially in the fields of modern poetry, novels and literature for children, who has been awarded Sahitya

Akademi Award, Bankim Award, Ananda Puraskar, who has gone to many countries to join literary conferences on invitation and who is now holding the prestigious position of the President of the Sahitya Akademi.

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 Asis Datta, the noted Scientist in the field of Molecular Biology and Genetic Engineering. A product of Calcutta University from where he got his Ph.D. and D.Sc. Degrees, Professor Datta became the Vice-Chancellor of Jawaharlal Nehru University in 1996 and the Director, National Institute for Plant Genome Research, New Delhi. Professor Datta has received many prestigious awards including Bhatnagar Award, Padma Shree Award in 1999 and Padma Bhushan Award in 2008.

The University feels honoured to show its tributes for these great men of Literature and Science.

Since the last Convocation which was held on 7th April 2007, the University has registered significant growth in the areas of teaching and research and in further consolidation of the infrastructural support. Within this period, the University has awarded Ph.D. Degrees to 47 candidates, of which 36 are in Science subjects and 11 are in the field of Humanities and Social Sciences. This is a significant increase in the number of Ph.D.s from our University as compared to 39 in 2006-2007, 32 in 2005-2006 and 15 in 2004-2005. In the last Session, Master's Degree has been awarded to 3781 candidates which include candidates from both the Regular and Distance modes. 10693 students have been awarded Undergraduate Degrees. The number of successful candidates in the B.Ed. Examination in the last year was 217, LL.B. – 149, Paramedical Courses – 138, Vocational (Major) – 79 and B.C.A. – 27.

It is heartening to note that though no new Department was opened in the last Session, the task of consolidating the infrastructural base of the existing Departments has been continuing. Semester System has been introduced in more Departments and we are hopeful that within 2008, all the 26 PG Departments will run on a Semester basis. In a few more subjects, M.Phil. Courses are being opened from this year.

To accommodate the increasing demand for higher education, Postgraduate programmes have been opened in the last year in a few more Colleges. Thus we have opened Chemistry in Panskura Banamali College and Bengali in Jhargram Raj College and in Ghatal Rabindra Satabarshiki Mahavidyalaya. Three new Colleges have been affiliated to the University during this year. These are Chaipat S. P. B. Mahavidyalaya, Daspur, Maharaja Nandakumar Mahavidyalaya, Nandakumar and Sankrail Anil Biswas Smriti

Mahavidyalaya, Kultikri. Affiliation has also been extended to one new B.Ed. College, namely, Subhas Chandra Basu B.Ed. Training College, Heria. The University has also extended affiliation to a few Colleges outside the two districts. Thus M.B.A. (distance education) Course in an Institute in Uluberia, M.S.W. Course in Durgapur and Paramedical Course in SHIS, South 24 Parganas have been affiliated during this year.

Though we are yet to overcome the stupendous infrastructural difficulties, our Postgraduate Departments have been trying their best to maintain high standard of teaching-learning method as well as R & D activities by undertaking several Research Projects during the year 2007-2008. The Funding Agencies are institutions like the UGC, DST, DBT, CSIR, WBPCB, DRDO, etc. The Departments which have received such types of Project Grants are Commerce with Farm Management (Prof. Arindam Gupta, UGC – Rs. 2,44,600.00); Economics with Rural Development (Prof. S. N. Sau, ICSSR – Rs. 3.63 Lakhs; Dr. Sevak Jana, ICSSR – Rs. 3 Lakhs and UGC – Rs. 85,000.00); Sociology (Dr. Soumyajit Patra, UGC – Rs. 80,000.00); Anthropology (Sri A. K. Kisku, UGC – Rs. 90,000.00); Aquaculture Management & Technology (Dr. Joydev Maity, UGC – Rs. 1 Lakh); Bio Medical Laboratory Science & Management (Dr. Debidas Ghosh, DST – Rs. 20,40,000.00); Botany & Forestry (Dr. Amal Kumar Mondal, UGC – Rs. 6,01,800.00); Chemistry & Chemical Technology (Dr. S. S. Islam, DST – Rs. 23,50,000.00; Dr. S. Dalai, DST – Rs. 19,26,000.00); Microbiology (Prof. B. R. Pati, UGC – Rs. 8,43,000.00; Dr. Debdulal Banerjee, DST – Rs. 16 Lakhs); Human Physiology with Community Health (Prof. Somenath Roy, DST – Rs. 20 Lakhs; Dr. Chandradipa Ghosh, DST – Rs. 20 Lakhs); Physics & Technophysics (Prof. P. K. Mahapatra, DST – Rs. 60 Lakhs); Geography & Environment Management (Sri Utpal Roy, UGC – Rs. 1 Lakh); and Zoology (Dr. J. K. Kundu and Dr. B. C. Patra, Government of West Bengal – Rs. 3.45 Lakhs and DST – Rs. 9 Lakhs). I wish to add here that such Research Grants not only act as a booster for research in the Department but also help to consolidate the Departmental infrastructure in an otherwise cash-crunch situation.

Apart from the Grants for Research in favour of individual teachers, our Postgraduate Departments have been receiving Grants as well as collaborative research assistance from several national and international institutions. Thus the Department of Microbiology has received an additional Grant of Rs. 5.10 Lakhs for its BIF Centre from the DBT along with Rs. 20 Lakhs received earlier. The Department has also undertaken collaborative research with the National Institute of Health and Family Welfare and Central Research Institute of Health and Family Welfare belonging to the Government of India. The Department of Human Physiology with Community Health has also launched collaborative research work with M D Anderson Cancer Research Institute, Houston, Texas, USA in the field of Cancer. It has, in addition, signed a MOU with the National

Centre for Cell Sciences (NCCS), Pune, an autonomous unit of DBT, Government of India.

The achievements of our students and teachers have also been recognized at national and international levels: One Ph.D. student in the Department of Bio Medical Laboratory Science & Management has been selected as a Post-doctoral Fellow at Texas A & M Institute, USA. Another Ph.D. Scholar in the Department of Microbiology has received Young Scientist Award from the National Environmental Science Academy (NESA), New Delhi. The same Academy has nominated Dr. Sudip Datta Banik, Lecturer in Anthropology of our University for the 'Environmentalist of the Year Award 2007'. Dr. K. S. Bose, Reader in Anthropology, has been nominated as an International Fellow of the Unit of Biocultural Variation and Obesity (UBVO), Oxford University. He has also become a member of the Editorial Board of the International Peer reviewed Journal, Annals of Human Biology. Dr. Abhijit Guha, Reader in Anthropology has been enlisted as a Referee in the Internationally acclaimed Journal, Development and Change. Dr. Madhumangal Pal of the Department of Applied Mathematics with Oceanology and Computer Programming has likewise been nominated as a member of the Editorial Board of the International Journal of Computer and System Engineers.

In recognition of the academic qualities, our teachers have been invited to present Papers or deliver Lectures abroad by various International organizations. Thus, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Patra of the Department of Aquaculture Management and Technology attended an International Conference on Aquaculture America, 2008 organized by the World Aquaculture Society, Orlando, Florida, USA during 9-12 February 2008. Dr. Abhijit Guha of the Department of Anthropology presented a Paper on 'Challenges of Corporate Social Responsibility; Need for Reforming Land Acquisition in India' in the Hallsworth International Conference held at the University of Manchester, UK on 6-7 December 2007. Dr. Raj Kumar Kothari of the Department of Political Science with Rural Administration participated in the Annual Conference of the World History Association, 2007 at Wisconsin, USA held from 28th June to 1st July, 2007 and presented a Paper there. Dr. Soumyajit Patra of the Department of Sociology also presented a Paper in the International Seminar on 'Alternative Expressions of the Numinous' organized by the Queensland University, Brisbane, Australia on 17-19 August 2007.

Besides, Sri Subir Kumar Basu, Dean of Students' Welfare of the University, attended the 3rd South Asian University Youth Festival held at Kathmandu University, Nepal to deliver Lecture and to Chair over a Session in the Festival during February 7-11, 2008.

Our teachers have participated in various National Level Workshops and Seminars also in order to actively participate in the thought process of the mainstream academic community. Altogether they have participated in 25 such Workshops and Seminars. In an effort to sensitize themselves and the students to the various academic issues, the Postgraduate Departments have organized various Seminars, Conferences and Training-cum-Workshops and Extension/Special Lectures at different time during the last year. The Departments which have organized such Seminars etc. are: Botany & Forestry, Applied Mathematics with Oceanology and Computer Programming, Anthropology, Sanskrit, Sociology, English, Economics with Rural Development, Bengali, Political Science with Rural Administration, Library & Information Science, Aquaculture Management & Technology, Commerce with Farm Management and Directorate of Distance Education. Vidyasagar University Teachers' Association and Vidyasagar University Officers' Association have also organized Visiting Lectures and Seminar. A Seminar jointly sponsored by the Indian Council of Historical Research and the Department of History of our University was held in December 2007 on the 1857 Uprising. Another Seminar jointly organized by the Department of Anthropology, University of Calcutta and the Departments of Sociology, Anthropology, Political Science and Economics was held in March 2008 on the Problems of Social Exclusion. Based on the proceedings of another interdisciplinary Seminar on The Women Question, the University has submitted a proposal to the UGC for the establishment of a Centre for Women Studies in our University. The University's Computer Centre has held several Staff Training/Awareness Programmes and workshops. It has also been engaged in various development and consultancy work. It may be mentioned here that, with the help of UGC Infonet Programme, we have upgraded our Bandwidth Connectivity to 2 MBPS which will substantially improve our connectivity capacity.

The Central Library has been engaged in providing improved services to the members through computerization of the System at every stage. Digitization of library materials with a view to creating archives of old question papers, selected permissible section of Ph.D. theses awarded by the University, has already been made.

In the year under review, the Directorate of Distance Education of our University has received a Grant of Rs. 40 Lakhs for strengthening infrastructural facilities and student support services. In the last year, an M.Sc. Course in Geography has been started at the Distance mode and moves are afoot to introduce M.Phil. Course in Dietetics and Community Nutrition Management and also in Environmental Science.

Infrastructural support for the University has been consolidated further within this period. Construction of additional Staff Quarters has been completed

and 24 Flats are now ready for distribution. Boundary Wall work has been completed. Work on the Students' Amenities Centre and on the building up of Infrastructural Support for Women Students and Staff is also on the verge of completion. We hope that within the next three months, the spacious Einstein Building will also be ready for use. Progress in the construction of the Silver Jubilee Humanities Building is also satisfactory.

Under the overall direction of the University level Advisory Committee and the supervision of the NSS Cell of our University, the NSS Units in this University and in the affiliated Colleges have been carrying out their regular activities. This year 12101 volunteers (Male 8218 and Female 3883) have been enrolled. In addition to the strength of the last year, six more units have been activated this year. Our NSS Cell has been able to organize 46 special camping programmes during this period. I am glad to state that in the last year two volunteers from this University were selected for participation at the Republic Day Parade at New Delhi. One NSS volunteer of our University visited the People's Republic of China as a leader of a Cultural Team which spent six months there performing various programmes. It is also a matter of pride that another NSS volunteer Ms. Anjana Singha, a student of one of the PG Departments, has been awarded the prestigious Indira Gandhi NSS Award by the Government of India for her outstanding achievement. Ms. Singha happens to be the first NSS volunteer of our University to receive such award.

As far as the sports and cultural activities of our students are concerned, the University has organized Inter-College Football, Volleyball, Kho Kho and Cricket Competition in the newly developed Sports Ground of the University. Inter-College and PG Cultural Meet was also organized this year which elicited an enthusiastic response from hundreds of our PG and UG students. We also feel pride to mention that our students participated in a Debate Competition held in October 2007 and sponsored by the Indian Association of Parliamentarians on Population and Development on a theme 'Growth of Population leads to Environmental Crisis'. Four of our students earned their rankings in this competition who are present today to receive the awards.

Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, the preceding President of India who was a great source of inspiration for the youth of the country, identified the goals of education in terms of enhanced capacity building on the part of the young learners. As he said, for participating in the nation-building tasks, the capacities required to be built among the students in their formative years by the educational institutions are: the capacity for research or inquiry, the capacity for creativity and innovation, the capacity to use high technology, the capacity for entrepreneurial leadership and the capacity for moral leadership. In order to build up these capacities what are required are a congenial and supportive educational structure, an inspiring knowledge leadership on the part of the

teachers who will play the role of facilitator and knowledge manager and a receptive, alert and enlightened mind on the part of the students. The development of such a mind set on the part of the young learner will initiate a process of life long learning and a capacity to set one's target and pursue it in a determined manner.

The question of the capacity to use high technology cannot be ignored. Educational institutions today should be equipped with adequate computing equipment, laboratory equipments, internet facilities with high bandwidth connectivity and provide an environment for the students to enhance their learning ability.

But technology support, however important it is, cannot be thought of in isolation from the human factor. We have issues like teacher-student ratio, enhanced capacity building on the part of teachers and providing inputs and creating motivation for research and innovation in the field of higher education. The UNESCO International Commission on Education for the 21st Century rightly pointed out, "The role of teacher will remain critical despite the emerging technical innovations. The older concept of curricula and routine teaching will have to be reassessed. The teachers will have to be intellectually motivated and academically challenging as an ongoing basis."

Enhanced capacity building on the part of the learners is the most challenging task. A supportive structure, a technology enabled educational pedagogy and an equipped community of teachers are necessary conditions but they are not sufficient to create adequate type of motivation amongst all sections of students. What is really a matter of concern is the uneven composition of the class room situation. Many of our even Postgraduate students are first-generation-learners fighting against various types of odds many of which lie beyond the parameters of the education system. An efficient educational system cannot be built up in the backdrop of an unjust and iniquitous socio-economic milieu. This feeling becomes particularly acute in a University like that of ours which is situated in a backward region where many of our students belong to socially and economically deprived sections of population. One has to take a holistic view of the situation and excellence in education cannot be an isolated endeavour.

It is gratifying to note that as a result of this realization the UGC has taken various schemes in the XIth Plan to realize the goal of an inclusive society. There is a plan to provide various types of special measures for the deprived sections of population, for the disadvantaged categories and for girl students. While implementing these measures in our University in a sincere manner, one has also to ensure that this does not create any distance between different sections of the student community, that this does not have any backlash effect.

Any talk of absolute equality in a socio-economic unequal situation is another name of supporting and perpetuating inequality.

To our young graduates: the Convocation is a ritual occasion to take a pledge to put your knowledge to work for the cause of human welfare. In your future journey as an enlightened citizen, the entire University community extends its good wishes to you. There is a famous saying that 'There are many Everests in the life of man. It is not the mountain we conquer, but ourselves.' In your struggle to overcome the obstacles and to ensure a smooth journey, the University community will be by your side.

I extend my sincere thanks and best wishes to all of you.
