



مولانا آزاد نیشنل اردو یونیورسٹی
Maulana Azad National Urdu University
Gachibowli, Hyderabad - 32 040 2300 6121

جلسہ تقسیم اسناد 2012 CONVOCATION

CONVOCATION ADDRESS

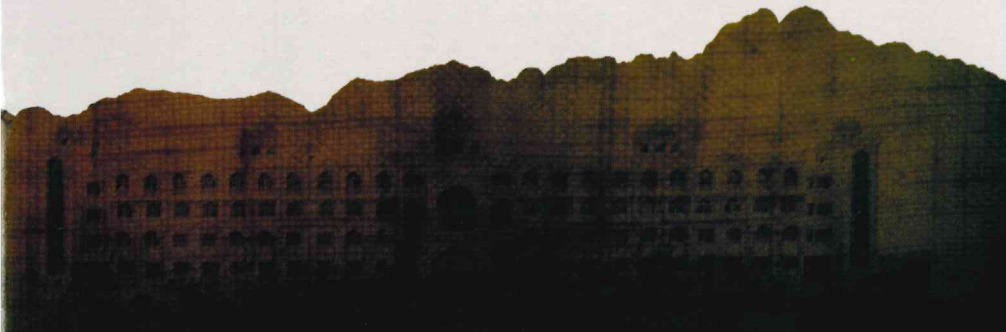
by

Shri Kapil Sibal

Hon'ble Minister of Human Resource Development
Government of India

3rd March 2012

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Chancellor Dr.Syeda Sayyadain Hameed, Vice Chancellor Prof. Mohammad Miyan, Honorable Members of the Executive Council, Academic Council, eminent guests, distinguished faculty members, and graduating students,

It gives me great pleasure to be in your midst today. As I rise to speak to you, my mind goes back to the days when the Maulana Azad National Urdu University was established as a special government initiative in 1998 and since then I see that it has grown tremendously in scope and size. Today you admit a lot more students than you did 13 years ago. Your university stands apart from other Central universities in terms of its special focus on imparting instruction through the Urdu medium. This I am sure has been a daunting task for many of you who have tried to meet the expectations of raising the standard of academics through language specific instruction in professional and non-professional courses. Like other language universities, this university is virtually unique not just in India but also internationally as it endeavours to equip the students through the Urdu language and strives to place them at par with students who graduate through the English medium. This has a dual benefit as well. The university stands for a commitment in extending and deepening the understanding of the beautiful language of Urdu by fostering an environment favourable to a lively research culture over a wide range of topics and theoretical approaches in Urdu. I don't think I am wrong if I say that this university that was once a fledgling has now taken flight and is able to stand in line with other Central universities today in terms of academic output. I recently heard about the two international conferences that were organized by MANUU which attracted reputed international scholars from over a dozen countries from all over the world. It warms my heart to see that

the Urdu language has been used to advantage to catapult the university onto the international platform. I want this institution to grow from strength to strength so that the nation benefits from the commitment and skills of the students that pass out from here.

Let me first congratulate all the students who are graduating today with a special word of congratulations to those who have received awards and medals. Needless to say, this is a great moment of joy and satisfaction in your life. On this solemn occasion that represents a major milestone in your careers, I express my heartfelt wishes to you and your families for all your achievements. Your success today follows years of patience, support and love of your parents and families and the dedication and commitment of your faculty. A Convocation day is an important event in the calendar of any educational institution as on this day the institution delivers on its promise. Young men and women, who have been nurtured for years within the confines of the institution, now enter the real world. Over the years the graduates and the university's fraternity develop strong bonds that extend well beyond education and degrees to create a lifelong lasting emotional relationship.

As we all are aware, the last couple of years have been turbulent for the world economy. In fact some of the strongest economies have faced a setback. Though Governments across continents have responded speedily, the path to recovery is long and difficult. India has not been immune to this shock. It is commendable that our country has displayed remarkable resilience sustaining relatively high growth rates, and several sectors have been impacted. Despite these setbacks, India's inherent strengths contribute to the building of a knowledge society and world economy.

My vision for higher education in India is a vision of global education and commitment to internationalize Indian

higher education, especially through partnerships with foreign institutions. This will help provide greater higher education access across India and open India's doors to increased global collaboration. We are confronting enormous challenges that afflict the global community for which we will need solutions and the only way that can happen is empowerment through education. There is no other way that we can combat the challenges of the 21st century. Education is about intense collaboration in an environment of competitiveness. The environment must be competitive, but the exercise must be collaborative. And it is through this spirit that we in India approach education. I take this opportunity to reach out to you and to say that it is time for us to hold each other's hands to confront the challenges of tomorrow.

I would specifically like to share with you today my views on the need to foster Smart and Useful Education, Internationalization and Global Partnerships, Technical and Management Education, Navaratna universities, Private Sector participation; Cultivating Reforms and Research Culture, Developing National Knowledge Functional Hubs and Higher Education Growth Strategy in the Twelfth Plan.

Smart and Useful Education

I believe in smart and useful education. The University system must allow mobility to students and needs to rise up from the current approach of limiting itself to teaching in specific streams such as arts and commerce as also limiting students to availing courses that are available only in their institution. The power of the communication revolution taking place in the country must be utilized so that a student in one university can access a course he/she would like to study from another university. I often wonder when everything in nature is cross disciplinary, in academics there is still a debate regarding this issue. We need to understand that multi-disciplinary study and research will result in creativity.

Policy planning and development strategies are needed to make higher education relevant to the present as well as the future needs of our society. There are some thematic areas that need to be discussed and debated such as: Access, Equity, Engagement and Outcome; Content and Quality; Research and Innovation; Faculty Development and Inter-University Resource Sharing; Internationalization in Higher Education; Alternative Modes of Delivery and Higher Education; Models of Financing; and Good Governance.

Take for example the cut-off percentages of 100% for humanities and science students applying for commerce courses which raged the country last year. This meant that students from some streams could not get admission to certain courses. In effect, science students, who have studied physics, chemistry, biology and English, will find it next to impossible to gain admission. Students from the humanities stream are anyhow not considered for admission to undergraduate courses in commerce and science streams. This is most unfortunate and irrational. This is not smart education.

I want to bring reforms in the college admission process. The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) has already sought public feedback on the idea of a national testing system for admission to higher education or the tertiary sector. A paper, "National Test Scheme for admission into Tertiary Education in India: Underlying Philosophy and Principles" has been prepared by a committee that gives a broad overview of the principles that will govern the proposed system. The ministry has put up the paper for public feedback. The committee has argued that a national testing system would help increase the spread of students who can seek admission into higher education institutions. Majority of youth living in smaller towns and far-flung places as well as economically weaker segments of society who are not able to join the competitive stream today will

benefit through this. The present system seems to be unconsciously promoting a societal behaviour and mindset towards differentiation rather than integration.

Internationalization & Global Partnerships

Since higher education is increasingly a global enterprise now, Indian institutions should embrace internationalization. This would provide them with new opportunities and help the country to enhance and improve standards of domestic provision and produce graduates with international competencies and skills. Given the historical advantage in higher education (particularly among emerging market economies) the wide spread use of English language and low cost living, India has potentially become a global hub for higher education. Partnerships with Foreign Education providers would be critical in this transformation.

I am interested in having foreign universities and community colleges like Stanford, Harvard or MIT come here and find partners in India in forms of twinning arrangements, joint degrees and diploma courses. We need to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio (the ratio of the college age population to that enrolled in higher education) to 30 per cent. This would need a three-fold increase in enrolment in higher education, from 14 million in 2010 to 40 million by 2020. Going by the pace of actual work on the ground, this seems impossible. To create a university with a reasonable infrastructure may take two years, but if we need to create the necessary infrastructure to meet a surge in college-going population, the pace of planning, construction activity and infrastructure support certainly needs to go up. In its report on the knowledge society, the National Knowledge Commission in 2008-09 had talked of the need to create many more universities. The higher education system needs a massive expansion, to around 1,500 universities nationwide to enable India to attain a gross enrolment ratio of at

least 15 per cent by 2015. The focus would have to be on new universities, and also some clusters of affiliated colleges which could become universities. This would require major changes in the structure of regulations. People are apprehensive whether foreign varsities would be sensitive to the Indian needs and culture. I assure you that we will not do anything which will harm our children. They will come to India on certain terms and conditions or else, we won't allow them to come. It is basically the large student strength in India that attracts the foreign universities in collaborating with Indian universities and let us benefit from this process.

In today's world, new partnerships need to evolve even outside of higher education. The model of a university operating high up in an ivory tower is increasingly becoming unacceptable. There is an immense need for business and community partners who understand the university's challenges in the domain of higher education. And likewise, the university/institution needs to understand what employers need from the graduating students so that they can be prepared in a manner to be successful in the workforce. In these difficult times, an investment in higher education will reap long-term dividends for any economy, but society needs to understand that and believe in it. That's why I say quality, accountability and flexibility go a long way in serving students.

Technical and Management Education

I have already increased the number of available seats in technical institutes by as much as 50 per cent, but the management education system has to provide solutions to problems faced by the common man. Can we, in the management system, bring about a change of mindset and look at management solutions that actually impact and affect the ordinary man on the street—the aam aadmi. Unless we move forward in that direction, the kind of wealth that we hope to

create will not be created for the good of the nation. However, at the moment, our management schools are more centered on getting placements (for their students) in big firms for fat salaries. Even children, who come to the management schools, look at the end of the one/two-year management courses to get employed in some profitable enterprise. I think, this a wrong way of looking at management, because there is much more than getting big salaries. There are huge problems in the country and there is a need to study the management of socio-economic issues in the society. I don't think there are any courses taught in India or in management schools that look at education as a management issue. We have to look into the issues of management for poverty. No case-study has been done with reference to slums and the people living there. There are other problems such as managing millions of teachers in schools and recruitment of these teachers and managing school administration.

Navaratna Universities

I feel strongly that India should aspire to have at least a few of its universities in the global top-league. Such universities would require significantly large resources and, also much greater autonomy. I am ready to give them this. To achieve this as quickly as possible, the country should act on two fronts. It should create new top-end universities and also upgrade the very good ones. A few centres of excellence could also be created within the University, building on their existing strength. At the core of achieving excellence, is ability of institutions to attract and retain high quality faculty from across the world. This not only requires providing them with competitive salaries but also ensuring a challenging work-environment and a lot of flexibility.

The proposed Navaratna Universities that I have spoken about from various platforms is with this specific purpose. The universities identified under this umbrella will enjoy a special

set of privileges, including the power to penalize non-performing faculty members. To ensure adherence of these varsities to exemplary standards, their special status will be reviewed every five years by the government and statutory bodies like the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG). According to the first draft prepared by the government, the selection of these Navaratna universities will be made from the University Grants Commission (UGC)-supported universities after going through a strict set of parametres for determining excellence.

This criterion is directly linked to the ranking of institutions by accrediting agencies, quality of teaching, programmes and courses and distinction in research. Though the number of universities that will become Navaratna is not yet decided, it is proposed that they should be reselected and reviewed every five years. There would be a broad list of UGC-supported institutes first and they would then be short listed. The ministry has set up a panel to look at the way these universities would be selected and shaped. While selecting these universities, their infrastructure, corpus grants, student profiles and peer recognition will also be taken into account. Just like the Navaratna PSUs, these universities will also get autonomy to compete in the global market and also help in curbing student migration to other countries in pursuit of higher education.

I have seen this model operate well in the West. There are eight Ivy League institutions in the USA (Brown University, Columbia University, Cornell University, Dartmouth College, Harvard University, Princeton University, the University of Pennsylvania and Yale University) and even Germany and Australia have also categorized their top institutions separately. Germany has nine Universities of Excellence while Australia has Group-8 comprising its top eight universities. We intend to nurture these select universities in India through generous financial support, freedom in accessing external funding and

total autonomy so as to free them from the shackles of government control.

Private Sector Participation

When I took charge as Minister of Human Resource Development, the priority on my mind was to improve the complicated issue of education system in India by bringing it to the forefront. And I am happy that we are moving ahead in that direction. The whole nation must come together and work towards improving the quality and quantity of education in India and empower the country.

As we all are aware the Indian higher education sector is in the midst of tremendous growth and change. The population demographic has created an unprecedented number of young people in this country. The scale of the problem that India faces in terms of educating and providing employment to its vast youth population is huge. The sheer size of the problem has made education a subject of national debate. In this scenario, there exist great opportunities for the private sector to play a dominant role. Private higher education accounts about four-fifths of enrolment in professional higher education and one-third in the overall higher education. We have at the higher level many private training institutions in the field of medical, engineering etc but many of them are not quality conscious. The private growth has been skewed, sometimes marred by use of unfair practices. Because of this, 44 Universities are to lose their deemed status, putting into jeopardy the status of more than 1

lakh students that is at stake now. The National Knowledge Commission and the Prof Yashpal-led Committee to Advise on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education have both recommended that the deemed to be university system needs to be scrapped. With universities running in just 2-3 rooms, it is obvious that deemed university is a mere tag that many use for dubious purposes. About 220 million people go to schools in India out of which only about 13 million reach college. As we don't have a critical mass of students going to college, we don't get enough intangible wealth of knowledge. So it is important that a critical mass of people go to school and also a critical mass of students go from elementary to higher level of education. It is not an easy task but we are moving in the direction and hope that from the present about 13-14 million students, about 45 million students will go in for higher education by 2020. It is here we need help from private players. The civil society, NGOS private players and many other such organizations should come together on education to empower India.

Cultivating Reforms & Research Culture

To improve teaching standards, reforms in higher education rarely focus on the students or the educational content. Issues like flexibility in curriculum design, innovative pedagogic practices and student friendly assessment are hardly discussed, even though these are central issues. Further, there are two critical elements that are missing in the Indian higher education. These are research based education, which is particularly good for enhancing critical thinking, and hands-on

vocational education, which can help students acquire practical skills essential for specific jobs. It depends on the kind of students we want to produce in our institutions and to improve education we need to change the curriculum and for that we need proper trained teachers. People also need to change their mindset for improving the quality of education. There is a need to increase online education in a big way and for that the country requires more broadband and naturally a huge investment is necessary. Once that happens any child can take any course in India and can also choose the teacher he wants even if he is in a different city. To meet this problem the nature of education must change and we should put in place the National Vocational Policy Framework. The CBSE will give vocational certificates and teach vocational courses to students between class VIII and XII.

India must bring back the lost research culture of its Universities so as to integrate knowledge creation with education that is essential for national socio-economic development. While not all higher education institutions need to undertake research, having world class multi-disciplinary research universities would be essential for creating educational content relevant to India and for reinforcing teaching for critical thinking. This would require more funding for university-based research and funding policies that create right incentives for quality research and promote collaboration among institutions.

Developing National Knowledge Functional Hubs

There are no appropriate industry-academia linkages and engagements in our country which is one of the critical reasons for a lack of quality graduates being produced. There should be meaningful participation of consortiums of higher education institutions and the corporate world through the establishing of National Knowledge Functional Hubs (NKFH). The scope of its emphasis should be on entrepreneurial, vocational and skill development. FICCI is working towards setting up of National Knowledge Functional Hubs in partnership with Industry Champions and Patron Institutions in various locations all over India with the objective to facilitate a sustainable mechanism for industry institute interaction.

Higher Education Growth Strategy in the Twelfth Plan

Over the next five years, the process of broadening access while making higher education inclusive initiated during the Eleventh Plan would be continued. However, the biggest risk in further expansion rests in the inadequate quality, which, unless dealt with early, could ultimately damage public confidence about the value of higher education. Hence, the government must focus on quality. To do this effectively, the government should focus on development of quality leading institutions which are innovative enough to develop educational content and pedagogical best practices.

While, there is a strong case for increase in public funds for higher education, there is also a strong case for better and more strategic use of public funds. For instance, funds from the Central Government could be used to

stimulate more State government funding for higher education and this should also get linked to governance and academic reforms. Conducive environment should be created for institutions to raise funds through legitimate means. Reasonable tuition fees should be supplemented with appropriate publicly funded financial aid and loan schemes with government guarantee.

There is a need for uniformity in access to knowledge. A proper financial, social, economic structure should be created which facilitates access to students. The time has come that confidence in the academic system is shown and that the academic system should also show confidence in itself. There has to be fairness, equitable treatment and equal opportunities for all despite the lack of funds and the consequent major cutbacks in the finance available to higher education. An important aspect of 'doing more with less' is to recognize, particularly in democratic societies, that those from disadvantaged backgrounds must be offered routes to access higher education. With the rapid growth of service and knowledge sectors in the economy, it is essential that people should be equipped to contribute to and likewise benefit from these developments. This again, as I have mentioned, requires radically overhauling the higher education system, with regard to access, enrolment and most importantly, quality. Failure to address this need and foster more inclusive growth will adversely affect India's future economic prospects and the welfare of its citizens.

However, in many parts of the world a high level of tertiary education attainment remains an aspiration and a dream. We live in a world where knowledge skills and

competence are essential to economic growth and to individual success. That is why there is such a hunger for information. Individuals, employers and Governments need to understand how well our educational institutions and systems can provide opportunity and quality in higher education through cost effective and flexible means that can stand up to the highest standards in the teaching-learning processes.

It is critical to identify development issues, challenges and reform agenda in higher education for the Twelfth Five-Year Plan period; and to provide inputs for policy planning and to carry forward the reform process into the new Plan period. I have from time to time held Conferences of the Vice-Chancellors in the backdrop of the progress made during the last Five-Years with regard to expansion, inclusion and excellence in higher education and likewise taken their inputs. Vice chancellors have the onerous responsibility of nurturing the students and building societal leadership.

Strengthening higher education linkages to society is a critical issue for India. Such linkages can be developed in three ways: relevant research should be conducted in collaboration with society (industry, government, as well as non-profit institutions), vocational education is to be developed through close working with employers, and teaching materials should be updated centering on critical socio-economic issues. If we really want our system to thrive, then the academic world should be left free to its own devices in the hope that you create a future for the country. For the right reforms to be implemented in the Higher Education sector there has to be more transparency and accountability in the system where students should also be allowed to assess

teachers. Germination of ideas takes place through the university system. If the university system is not effervescent, energetic and creative, then you would be relegated to the knowledge of the past. There will be nothing for you to contribute to the creation of the future. Let us together bring about a fundamental shift in the higher education set up, by creating an atmosphere that allows greater student mobility and an academic world that has the freedom to chart its own future.

Thank You.