

**Justice V. R. Krishna Iyer**

Former Judge, Supreme Court

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Vice-Chancellor Prof. Dhanagare, the University's executive and academic communities, the creamy layer and cultured elite of this historic city, the younger generation of sisters and brothers - the undergraduates, graduates and alumni - who are the human hope of Bharat, and the finer fraternity gathered here from far and near filled with concern for the future of our great Republic I greet you all on this festive occasion of ceremonial splendour when degrees will be conferred and other honours awarded, making the Convocation colourful and the proceedings felicitous, since it marks an event of great moment in the life of the Shivaji University and the career of the student body as they look back to the delectable days spent in this vast and lovely campus. I congratulate those who graduate and win laurels and again, all of you together, because there is a collective element of achievement and culmination of co-operative striving when an annual span concludes and the curtain falls, leaving us all to ponder over the past in critical retrospect. An eclectic assessment of the educational kismet of Shivaji University and a cultural audit of its noetic affairs from a national perspective and universal objective are a proper and necessary exercise. The issues I address here are of wider interest to those who hold that a University has a value-oriented mission and vocational contribution to make for the material and moral transformation of our democratic order and the promotion of the scientific temper of the youth. It is a fundamental duty of a University to catalyze the spirit of enquiry and galvanize the faculties of the students towards excellence in all spheres of individual and collective activity so that the nation constantly rises to higher levels of endeavour and achievement.

Before moving on to my address let me thank Prof. Dhanagare for having honoured me with an invitation to deliver this year's Convocation Address. I wonder how the choice fell on me, an octogenarian in the sunset stage of life, a juristic heretic-cum-maverick and quondam judicial iconoclast allergic to the orthodox Establishment. Being terribly busy with more public commitments than I can fulfill, I should have politely declined the gracious request, aware though I am, that almost all the battles that I have waged in chase of people's causes have ended up bearing my tired wings in the void in vain. Never-the-less, what fascinated me in saying 'yes' to Prof. Dhanagare was partly the great name of your University and partly my school-boy recollection of Maharashtra's illustrious son, Justice

Ranade, whose life as a front-rank judicial nationalist and social reformer was an essay in my class text ! Old memories cling long and impart a special charm to luminous names. Yet another attraction. Shivaji is a charismatic name personifying resurgent nationalism blended with courageous warriorism shining in golden letters in the pages of Indian history. Ranade was a rare combination of a great Judge of light and learning, social reformer with patriotic commitment and versatile genius, renowned historian and economist, and guru of sorts of Gandhiji in the early days of the Mahatma's militant politics. Kolhapur City ! so venerable, so historic, whispering from her halls of learning, libraries and laboratories inspiring a patriotic generation with a vision of the great promise of India's liberation ! Meeting the young talents and intellectuals of a mammoth University like yours with over 200 affiliated Colleges is itself a cultural experience and spiritual stimulation. No country can advance, even with the blessings of Almighty Dollar for which our leaders and tycoons mendicantly implore, if its college campuses and university disciplines are barren of creative intelligence and character-building processes. Ultimately, education is the manifestation of the divinity, dignity, excellence in studies and value-orientation of every person who is touched and refined by the ampler air and finer stream of these mansions of erudition, intelligence and integrity.

The best test of a country's progress is the edifying impact of the classroom, the extra-mural attainments and the scientific temper generated in the youth. Indeed, the right to life is meaningful only if dignity and faculty and moral sensitivity are acquired by every member in society. These are not commodities to be bought in the shop like Kentucky fried chicken, coke, hamburger, Scotch whiskey or fast foods from Macdonald's, by paying a fast buck. Graduation is not a cash-and-carry product or capitation fee purchase confined to the affluent sector. On the contrary, affluent consumerism - the disease of 'affluenza' - which not only possesses the nouveau riche of India, is a killer pathology which philistinises, even barbarizes, our rising generation, and pauperises and criminalises the morally vulnerable circle which is tempted into the Circean spell of violent, vulgar life or initiated into the cocaine cult of moral morbidity. What about the vast 'rurban' millions who have nothing to look for except blood, toil, tears and sweat and nothing to lose except their lives ? Are these submerged invisible agrestics people who do not matter ? Where lucre is the open sesame for entry into the portals higher learning, the have-not humans cease to be equal citizens ! What a structural misadjustment of our Socialist Republic violative of the egalitarian legacy of our Founding Fathers ! Corruption is now the counterfeit coin in pervasive circulation

currently in our country not only in political offices and administrative establishments but ubiquitously operational in the hallowed precincts of professional education, why, polluting even admission to L.K.G. and U.K.G., spiralling up to the highest decks of degree-distributing institutions ! If the destiny of the nation is shaped in the classrooms of our schools of learning it is basic patriotism to vaccinate our educational system against commercialism and pasteurise our public life against the contamination of base bribes. To-day, the needle of suspicion is pointed at even the summit seats of constitutional power and even journalists, justices and gurus of diverse religions, not to speak of the money-hungry managers of medical, scientific and military establishments and other strategic, sensitive organs of national life. Never in the history of Gandhi India did Mr. Corrupt become so democratised in our Socialist Republic ! This malignant cancer is not incurable. But the therapeutics for this pathologic toxin must be administered by a dynamic, dramatic drive to immunize our school culture from the vices of market-friendly materialism, 'grabby' liberalism and gargantuan globalism. Otherwise, dialectically analysed, 'hawala' rule of law and 'Bofors' rule of life are inevitable both as process and product in a country where Almighty Dollar serendipitously becomes the principal deity to be worshipped. A hard look at our educational values is the first step to remedy the malady. The source of hope is our public universities.

What with the Bofors scandal, Securities scam, Vohra Committee revelations, Hawala viral syndrome and the protean forms and versatile novelties of macro-scale politico-mafiosi manifestations, Indian humanity is flabbergasted and bewildered by the brazen and ubiquitous wheeler-dealer operations of the governing elite. Where lies the blunder, they wonder, and ask what our Republic's ominous future is. People's power must punitively wipe out the criminality of Bharat (mafia) unlimited ! No placebo effect of Party rhetoric nor nocebo effect of resignations by political heavy weights nor the voodoo of judicial writs can extirpate corruption until student power, youth power and the vast community's conscientised power awakes with enlightened vigour and planned programmes of non-violent action, making purification of public life a sine qua non of Indian development. Our national education has to get out of mere book-bound, marks-focussed lucubrations and get to grips with national realities and fight evil without inhibitions. The old dogmas of University learning cannot face the new challenges of national crises. The cure for corruption in public life is the incorruptability factor in education. In this dimension, our Universities are our Salvationist instrumentalities. Without fear or favour, affection or ill-will, all issues must be

discussed with dialectical probity and Gandhian purity.

Education, as John Ruskin explained in lovely diction : “is not teaching the youth the shapes of letters and the tricks of numbers, and leaving them to turn their arithmetic to roguery and their literature to lust. It means, on the contrary, training them into the perfect exercise and kingly continence of their bodies and souls. It is a painful, continual, and difficult work to be done by kindness, by watching, by warning, by precept, and by praise, but, above all, by example.”

Culture is a matter of the heart and love of the people, not a matter of masala slogans or populist claptrap which is the electoral opium of the masses. Let me cite Vivekananda who stressed the essence of education in emphatic terms “They talk of patriotism. I believe in patriotism and I also have my own ideal of patriotism. Three things are necessary for great achievements. First, feel from the heart.. Do you feel ? Do you feel that millions and millions of the descendants of gods and of sages have become next door neighbours to brutes ? Do you feel that millions are starving today and millions have been starving for ages ? Do you feel that ignorance has come over the land as a dark cloud ? Does it make you restless ? Does it make you sleepless ? Has it gone into your blood, coursing through your veins, becoming constant with your heart-beats ? Has it made you almost mad ? Are you seized with that one idea of the misery of ruin, and have you forgotten all about your name, your fame, your wives, your children, your property, even your own bodies ? Have you done that ? That is the first step to become a patriot, the very first step.”

Judged by this crimson, humane standard, invasion by foreign corporate infiltrators and their native collaborators, under a globalese theology of marionette economics, is a dubious bargain. This criticism is not xenophobia or claustrophilia but simple self-reliance of Gandhian, Nehruvian vintage. We need radical humanism, dynamic secularism, and synthesis of material and spiritual values instilled thro’ our educational system, sans which this country will be mere geography inhabited by a conglomeration of wrangling communities and hungry political operators.

Our founding fathers, realising the importance of the human right to education, had made it a ‘principle fundamental in the governance of the country’ that the State shall make effective provision, within its utmost economic capacity, for securing the right to education to persons who have no means of their own (Art. 41). Nay more. The State is obligated to provide, within a period of 10 years from the commencement of the Constitution, for *free and compulsory*

education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years (Art. 45). Read with the right to life (Art. 21), the Supreme Court has held this to be a *fundamental* right. And yet, nearly two score and ten years after, India's illiteracy is a shameful fifty percent and female illiteracy a shocking sixty percent. Absent literacy, education is illusion; and higher education is the monopoly of the propertariat, the proletariat being left to do bonded labor if denied the State-obligated minimum of primary and secondary education nor the means to gain access to colleges. Illiterate India is condemned to mass misery if education is limited to the creamy layer of society whose children buy seats from babyhood onwards in English Medium L. K. G. to master's degree in professional courses. Please recall Martin Luther who said : "The prosperity of a country depends, not on the "abundance of its revenues, nor on the strength of its fortifications, nor on the beauty of its public buildings; but it consists in the number of its cultivated citizens, in its men of education, enlightenment and character."

Human resources are the great promise of a nation's future. Our optimistic and straight forward Finance Minister has had to confess at a Convocation Address that around 40% of our people virtually live below the destitution line, euphemistically called "poverty line" as austerely defined by the Planning Commission. With all our boasts of boundless advance, we rank as 134 in the human development index, according to the Human Development Report 1995, published by the U. N. D. P. Our Finance Minister further revealed here last year (1994) :

"Even now, of every 1000 children bom in India, nearly 80 die before they reach the age of one year. Progressive degradation of land and water resources threatens the livelihood of millions of farmers living on the edges of subsistence. Our urban areas are unable to cope with the growing pressure of population and large sections of people do not enjoy access to such basic amenities as safe drinking water and sanitation."

Again, in another such speech in Bangalore he pleaded : "I have a strong feeling that over the years, the *Governments at the Centre and the State have invested far too much* of their administrative and financial resources in industry and trade and *neglected such basic tasks as provision of a decent system of elementary education and primary health care and control of environmental degradation*. There has also been *inadequate sensitivity to the gender issues in our quest for equity and development*."

This is a moderate statement. The actual situation is unspeakably pathetic.

Go to starving Kalahandi or Surat's plagued slums

It is amazing that India has, perhaps, the largest number victimised by bonded labour, child labour, female infanticide, physical and mental disablement and illiteracy escalating year after year in gross numbers, while the 'greats' in power flatter us with figures of declining inflation and of bloated investments by G. 7 cartels, developmentally irrelevant and expensively consumerist, thereby occupying our scarce economic space, robbing our natural resources, polluting our biosphere and strangling us in *the* long run with trade trap, debt trap, chemical trap, and which, unless arrested, may prove a death trap. Orwell's doublespeak alone can explain how we can claim to be more prosperous. When prices of life's necessities, like food and medicine, clothes and housing, are ballooning beyond the reach of the populace, it is baloney to claim that there is growth and development. The fundamental issue is *what* is development and for *whom*? Is market marijuana which magnets multi-national corporations into our naive nation a matter for pathos or bathos? To scuttle the Constitution's socialist basics is to bastardize our social order. And when Enron syndrome and Union Carbide gassasination occur, should not protests and critiques rise loud and clear from intellectuals? Silence is guilt where there is a duty to speak.

Look at the contradictions in our priorities. We have no drinking water for many but Scotch parlours are aplenty! Marie Antoinette remarked before the French Revolution and the guillotine, when told that her people had no bread, let them eat cake! What was her fate?

The point I am driving at is about the poverty curtain more impenetrable than the iron curtain. The classes and the masses in many countries are facing extremes of prosperity and poverty, the wealth of nations going to the North and the poverty of nations sinking in the South. One is reminded of Charles Dickens in the "Tale of Two Cities"

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way."

Let me not sound like Cassandra prophesying doom. India has also made great strides after Independence, of which all of us, the share-holders of India Incorporated, can rejoice.

There is no doubt that we have advanced in science and technology, built big dams and executed giant projects, and, with a vision of swadeshi and self-reliance, created a strategic public sector which occupied the commanding heights of the national economy and simultaneously promoted also Joint and Private sectors, Co-operative and Small Scale enterprises geared to the needs of the people. Likewise, our defence department has achieved marvels and our pharmaceuticals have registered remarkable discoveries; our nuclear technology has done us proud; but taking a holistic view of the life of nearly one billion Indian humans, our Socialist Republic shaped its policies and projects to wipe out poverty by heroic strategies. Everyone in power, accountable in democracy, must remember that “history is about the most cruel of all goddesses” - (Engels). So we must be wary and should not go crazy about Mercedes Benz, Coke, dangerous dams, luxury imports and M.N.Cs who corrupt our public life and subtly engineer Operation Recolonisation !

Our scientists are among the foremost in the world, even so our technologists, we being the third largest scientific community in the world. We have made industrial advance and agricultural progress. Steel, coal, biodiversity, Operation Road and Green Revolution, and an independent Justice System, are some of our positive points. It is, therefore, right to feel proud of our attainments in the field of science and arts and the diversity of our cultures. Therefore, it is not my object to detract from the social, economic and cultural ascent after we attained Independence. Even so, it behoves us to be honest to ourselves and be faithful to the Constitutional goals. The Supreme Sovereign, as per the Preamble which is inviolable, is “*We the People of India*” - everyone of the 950 billion humans who are Indians, be their religion or region what it may. The masses of Indian mankind suffered feudalist privations with graded inequalities and colonial servility. That is why we became a rich country with poor people. A nation with a vast reservoir of human and material resources but a large humanscape condemned to a life of chill penury, homeless and half-starved, must be able to exercise self-criticism, not self-deception. After all, a University is a hallowed place which breathes the finer spirit of knowledge and the fearless expression ‘which is in the countenance of all science’. Universities are functional only if they impart knowledge and integrity fearlessly. As T.H. Huxley put it :

“If a little knowledge is dangerous, where is the man who has so much as to be out of danger ?”

We must dare and do and act on knowledge-based conclusions. Knowledge

is power and we must dare to learn and expose. We have to be gravely guarded against genuflecting before the North or, with a yen for “West is best” economies, create a yuppie class. Our youth should not degenerate into limpet, lumpen or loony categories. The Indian cultural treasury is a glory of which we must be proud. Look at the sole Super-Power which dictates to us the do’s and don’t’s of our political and economic and even military strategies ! Our ‘trade’ and ‘service’ sectors cannot be pledged to the private, profitmaking proclivities of the world’s self-appointed gendarmerie or the W.T.O’s commandments. Our sovereignty and security are the first charge on the youth’s commitments. We must beware of the conditionalities of foreign aid and be equally wary of the strategy of the M.N.Cs which use world hunger as big business and bend Third World countries into banana republics and cucumber colonies. ‘Small is beautiful’ and appropriate technology are what Gandhiji and Schumacher taught us, not high-tech, conquests.

Food First, a best seller in the U.S., tells us with facts and figures how giant businesses from abroad ‘modernise’ our hunger with fertilisers and pesticides and suppress our vintage agriculture and promote a dependencia syndrome. Even the green revolution viewed in retrospect, is suspect success.

Maybe, you may wonder how my wandering address has pertinence to a University Convocation. At Oxford and Harvard et al everything that affects national and international issues is discussed, bluntly, if need be, and critically always. It is, therefore, appropriate that at a time when the nation is stunned by corruption and passes thro’ a crisis of reversal of established policies, everything that impacts on our ‘tryst with destiny’ must come under your scrutiny. Glasnost or transparency in government, freedom of information and fearless expression are demands Universities must encourage if we are to know the truth. “And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free”. I may be wrong in my ominous observations. But do keep an open mind, resist subtle forms of “new slavery” and insist on a Just World Human Order. Public matters must never hide under official secrecy but must be exposed to the sunshine of people’s gaze. Democracy is incompatible with bureaucracy which revels in what Churchill called a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma. The tragedy of our times is public apathy and cloistered power process which facilitate corrupt practices. We are the Third World and within its frontiers are a destitute Fourth World. Why are we victimised and by whom ?

Dr. V. Kurien, the pride of India in the field of dairy self-sufficiency, forcefully argued about the division of the world as North and South as the new imperialism that threatens mankind in his Address at the Eighth World Congress of Food Science



and Technology “It would mean that one-fourth of the world’s population would occupy three-fourths of its area while the remaining three-fourths of the world’s people must make do on but one-fourth of its land. This basic fact, I would argue, is the reason we are poor. And, should we not ask the question: how much of this land was the historical home of its present population, and how much was forcibly occupied ?”

Dr. V. Kurien also exposed the covert imperialism of the North and the unfortunate surrender of the South, particularly India. The Western wave wipes out the wisdom of generations of Indians. He asks “What are the lessons to be drawn from our experience ? I believe the first and most important lesson is that we must trust the wisdom, the innocence and the enlightened self-interest of the people”. We have and had technological capacity but now we condemn and feel contempt for our own achievements and hanker after dazzling foreign goods and services and hasten to sign treaties contrary to swadeshi and sovereignty.

American scholar Prof. Noam Chomsky rightly complains in a recent interview about the damage that liberalisation does to the poor. In his own words

“India (has always) had very advanced agricultural, agricultural research projects, programmes and so on. But they are being destroyed, bought up by multinationals. The Indian scientists are very good. They now get five times more salaries working for multi-nationals. This is an agrarian country. It needs agricultural research. Take pharmaceuticals. India has had quite an effective pharmaceutical industry. Drugs in India were much cheaper than Pakistan because India used to produce itself. Now it has got to stop. Neo-liberalism means you destroy the pharmaceutical industry.” (HINDU dated 22-1-96)

University intellectuals must stem the rot and passionately rouse the slumbering nationalism and the talent lying under the debris, so that brave new Bharat may be your pride.

‘Industrialise or perish’ was a seductive slogan which, by insensitivity to considerations of sustainable development, made the Third World poorer in quality of life, perilous in toxicity of environment and destroyed values too dear to be jettisoned. And now, we have, by the entry of M.N.Cs like the Union Carbide et al and their simian imitators at home and comprador cliques geared to maximum profit, whatever the social cost and eco-catastrophe, reached tragic terminal illness; and so, the ghastly reality is ‘industrialise and perish’. A new synthesis is the desideratum where development with holistic humanism takes over from growth sans common good.

Reflecting with a disturbed conscience, I sometimes wonder whether the

volte face from a socialistic pattern to an I.M.F. structured acquisitive society with heartless conditionalities is a contra-Constitutional coup, or a myopic blunder of our leaders under yankee commercial-military pressures. Youth power is the locomotive of our constitutional order with its left slant. Maybe, I am in error but the future will tell us who is right ? By then, it may be irreparably late. Ask yourselves Quo vadis Socialist Indian Republic ?

Let me conclude. My personal philosophy is what has been best articulated by Terence more than 2000 years ago and by Marx much later “I am a human being. I count nothing human alien to me.” Ancient Indians had a world perspective and universal philosophy. We are heirs of that cultural heritage. You are the builders of a New World Order with egalite, not hegemony, where human rights are an accessible reality and every man, woman and child on this planet has the opportunity to accomplish her or his potential. These are the values to build a better world, to strengthen a Juster Order and to reverence diversity of systems in our pluralist universe.

The moral, mental and material odyssey of India must appeal to you intellectually and prod you to lively analysis and synthesis. That is the way the vast reservoir of creativity Indian youth possesses can be mobilised in our war against poverty, ignorance, disease and, above all, colonial intellectualism. Your commitments are the twin pursuits of excellence and social equity. Your University must endeavour to mould the minds of the youth and strive to draw up and execute a truly national Indian agenda of development which empowers the people at large and defends the independence and self-determination of a near-billion united community, we call India, that is Bharat. What an exciting challenge ! What a mighty task! The degrees you have been granted to-day carry a heavy responsibility to your country. Don't run away to the Visa office of some foreign country but work hard here at home to make India great and yourself strong. Do battle against communalism, casteism and parochialism. There is enough in this land for everyone's need, but not for a few swindlers' greed. The journey is long and we are far from home. We have promises to keep and miles to go before we sleep. Your Alma Mater is your inspiration in the selfless, stainless career you must carve out as your goal in life.

I conclude my oral prolixity with a final appeal for your total commitment to the people of India. I quote from a Tagore - Gandhi dialogue to hammer home my submission :“Once Gurudev Ravindranath Tagore asked Gandhiji, “Gandhiji are , you so unromantic ? When in the early dawn, the morning sun rises, does it not fill your heart with joy to see its reddish glow ? When the birds

sing does not your heart thrill with its divine music ? When the rose opens its petals and blooms in the garden does its sights not bring cheer to your heart ?”

The Mahatma replied “Gurudev, I am not so dumb or insensitive, as not to be moved by the beauty of the rose or the morning rays of the sun or the divine music of the birds. But what can I do ? My one desire, my one anxiety, my one ambition is when shall I see the red tint of the rose on the cheeks of hungry naked millions of my people ? When shall I hear the sweet and melodious song of the birds in place of their agonising sighs ? When will such music come out of their soul and when will that day come when the light of the morning sun will illumine the heart of the common man in India ? When will I see its lustre and brightness on his face ?”

**A last Caveat :** Privatisation and, its first cousin, commercialisation are pollutants if they capture education as trade-related ‘goods’ and ‘services’. There is, in the wake of the contra-spiritual ‘dis-enlightenment’ emanating from the I.M.F., a nascent tendency to privatise universities and commoditise degrees and a legislation - The Private Universities (Establishment And Regulation) Bill, 1995 - is pending in the Rajya Sabha. Philanthropists are welcome; vocational courses geared to national needs, industrial, agricultural and other, are good. Accountable autonomy for institutions of higher learning is obligatory. But to make education a trade or business is to vulgarise hallowed spaces of light, liberty and learning. It is for you, young friends and the academe to defend our vintage values against assaults by the moneyocracy.

The finest function of a University is to make the student community tolerant, yet independent, ready to hear both sides but be firm on fundamentals. This thought has been best expressed by Gandhiji with matchless brevity:

“I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But, I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.”

I thank you all for your gracious presence and gentle patience.

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