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Hon'ble Vice Chancellor of Shivaji University, distinguished members of the authorities of Shivaji University, eminent scholars and prominent elite from the areas under the jurisdiction of the University, and from Kolhapur city, young men and women who are recipients of degrees in this Convocation, and all other friends

I am greatly honoured by the invitation extended to me to be with all of you to-day and to share with you some of my thoughts on education and society, especially at the present juncture in our national life. At the same time, I feel greatly privileged to be here because I was present at the inaugural function of this University and now I have a chance to see how beautifully it has grown over the years. Also, I have an emotional relationship with Kolhapur. I have lived and worked here, constantly learning from an eminent scion of this city, namely, my late husband Padmabhushan J. P. Naik, about the past glories of the Princely State of Kolhapur. I admire the social and cultural contributions made by the noble rulers, scholars, planners, professionals and artistes who were nurtured in the progressive atmosphere of Kolhapur State. Great masters of music, painting, film-making, literature, theatre, science and technology, small and big industry, town-planning, economic planning, sports and games, and varied academic pursuits have been the products of the cultural atmosphere of Kolhapur. Many a freedom fighter has been born and brought up in Kolhapur. The cultural wealth of Kolhapur is so impressive that it is fondly named 'Kalapur' by many of its admirers. The princely state of Kolhapur was blessed with the benevolent liberalism of Shri. Shahu Chhatrapati Maharaj for almost 38 years from 1884 to 1922. He built up Kolhapur as the cultural centre of Maharashtra. Under his leadership it became a liberating force for the downtrodden communities and helped spread this movement beyond the borders of the State. Special facilities were provided for the education of the poor and backward youth during the regime of Shree Shahu Maharaj and Shri Rajaram Maharaj also. Kolhapur continued to lead the way in higher education. It was then seen as the essence of progressive Maharashtra. It is this great legacy that the Shivaji University has inherited. Its academic and social foundations are strong enough to enable it to move easily into the new scenario of education in the new millenium.

I warmly congratulate the new recipients of degrees at this convocation and

offer them my best wishes for a bright future. I would urge them to be conscious of the progressive socio-cultural traditions of Kolhapur which have no parallel in this country. I am sure this inheritance will inspire them to build for themselves, and for the Indian society, a vibrant future.

Let me now share with you some of the national concerns about the present educational scene and its impact on society. A doubt has arisen in many a thoughtful mind whether India has the capability of facing the challenges of the new millenium. The education system in the country is in a state of confusion. It has been unable to reach the majority of our people. In India, nearly 13 percent youngsters of school age are still unenrolled in grades I to V. As to grades VI-VIII, non-enrollment is 37 per cent. The dropout rate for the primary stage is 39.74 per cent. In grades VI-VIII as many as 56.82 percent drop out.. The overall dropout from grade I to X is 67.44 per cent. (In Maharashtra, it is around 63 per cent, i.e. slightly lower than the all-India picture.) Of the remaining 32.66 per cent, fifty percent fail in the SSC examination. From among those who pass, very few can proceed to the higher secondary stage and higher education.. The question is : what becomes of the nearly 87 per cent youngsters who cannot climb the gradewise educational ladder? Why do they drop out? Are they unintelligent? If the country's vast proportion of youth is branded as uneducated because they are unintelligent, how can we hope to enter the new globalized world of challenges filled with science and technology? It is obvious that it is not the lack of intelligence among our youngsters but the irrelevance of the education system that is causing such havoc. The education system, based on the 19th century model of the British system of education has been the bane of our national life. We require a modern system to suit the circumstances, the learning needs, the world of work of our people. New styles of learning like open education provide some answers to our educational problems. In Britain, in the European countries and in the USA, it is possible for anyone to study outside the precincts of a school or college with the help of new technology, even while working for a livelihood. In China, higher education of various types can be offered co-operatively by industry, special training institutions, and universities. Practical ideas and models of education are functioning elsewhere. But we are slow in studying them, and designing our own education system. We are still wedded to the old British model, because we still have a colonized mindset. It is particularly strong in our bureaucratic system which does not favour change. The present educational system is highly centralized and authoritarian. It is based on mutual mistrust as reflected in our Univer-

sity Acts. It does not have the flexibility demanded by the problems of development our country has to grapple with in the new millenium. If we wish to respond positively to the challenges of the present Age of Insecurity in which information and communication technologies dominate all sectors of life and in which globalized markets are upsetting conventional ideas of education and work, we must seriously think of changing the education system as fast as possible. The old outmoded 'education system' must soon be replaced by a 'vibrant, dynamic education service' for our people.

For bringing about this change, we need not immediately pull down conventional structures. What we need is the transformation of administrative practices and educational processes. For instance, the conventional fourfold tasks of a university viz. teaching, research, publications, and extension can certainly be renovated to suit the demands of the times. In this process, the intervention of information and communication technologies will be inevitable. Teaching and learning will not remain a closed system with just one teacher delivering his or her stock-of-knowledge. Class-room learning may be combined with open learning, individually and collectively. Teachers would have to ensure that students do not remain passive and that their learning is made active through discussion, debate, practical experience, and investigative action-programmes whether in natural sciences and social-sciences, whether in history and philosophy, or in language and literature. This kind of learning will not be tightly packaged but would leave scope for the student to acquire knowledge through some self-effort, exerting his or her own intelligence and initiatives. In the rapid changes that the world has begun to witness in the world of knowledge must be combined with the world of work and the habit of autonomous learning must be acquired. For managing our tasks, all of us would have to keep learning meaningfully.

So much for teaching and learning. The next item on the agenda of universities is research. While preparing the IX Five Year Plan it was found that much of the research conducted by universities whether in humanities, social sciences or the natural sciences had hardly any linkages with national development goals. Another shortcoming of the university-based research process has been the non-involvement of students in the research process, even at the post-graduate level. It is now necessary to transform our style of research. The universities must soon establish a policy-dialogue with government, the industrial sector, the rural development sector and voluntary agencies working with the people at the ground level so that the research-effort produces 'active and performance-oriented knowl-

edge' instead of sterile theses which merely burden the shelves of university libraries. It is also necessary to realize that while research has to be integrally related to teaching on the one hand it is equally important to connect it with the extension activities of the University. Spread of knowledge among the people is a prime duty of every educational institution and particularly the universities. For this purpose, the university-level researchers must know the needs and capabilities of the people. It is now recognized that action-research is as important as basic and empirical research for the discovery of knowledge. Policies for mankind's well-being and progress require all three styles of research. The material for meaningful basic and action-research in natural and social sciences can often become available through extension programmes. Such research could be publicized through the publications programmes of universities for information of administrators and social workers.

In the new era of internet which can offer a variety of need-based and career-oriented learning programmes through open education, the universities must sit up and to take serious note of these changes. If they do not, they have little chance of survival in the modern age where constant overhaul of knowledge and action is becoming the law of life. The youth of to-day must be trained to contend with serious competition in every avenue of performance, whether in the working place or in social matters. They would be deprived of their chances in life if the universities do not alter the contents of the courses they prescribe and the processes of teaching-learning. The globalization of the market-economy calls for a whole range of new, unconventional skills. The products of universities must know about the new world of work. Constant relearning would be essential for all, especially in professional disciplines like medicine, engineering, law, agriculture, commercial processes, media, administration, teaching and so on. The emerging 'human resources needs' of a globalized world must be positively addressed by each university and its faculty must convert itself into a community of scholars which engages in life-long learning so as to assist the younger generation to undertake a similar process.

Our universities need to remind themselves that they are to work in a country which is suffering both from educational poverty and economic poverty. Barring the uppercrust of about 25 crores of the well-to-do in India, the remaining 75 crores and more have to struggle to make a living. Of these, as many as 30 crores live below the poverty-line, which means the availability of barely one meal a

day. The problem of illiteracy in the rural areas is still most daunting, especially among rural women. The health of our people is a cause of concern because nearly 80 per cent of the population is either undernourished or malnourished. Educated unemployment is quite high. While it is 60 percent in the rural areas it is as high as 65 percent in the urban areas. Discrimination against women still prevails. Consequently, the number of unemployed educated women is higher than that of men, especially in the urban areas. Universities which are expected to be the designers and producers of educated human resources, must take note of this disastrous situation. If they are to be an asset to the nation and not a burden on the national exchequer, their present character must change. The history of education in India points out that places of learning which do not serve the community are rejected by the people. The ancient universities of Nalanda and Takshashila ultimately collapsed because they failed to serve the community in which they were situated. They were seen by the people not as saviours but exploiters of society. Our modern universities must learn from these examples. In the modern age, government responsibility for higher education is bound to decline and universities will have to approach the people for support. But the support will depend on what they offer to society. Only teaching and research within the precincts of the universities and colleges is no longer going to be enough. People-oriented outreach activities would have to be the “core programmes” of universities. The technology-programmes for better working life would be largely available to the people through the Open Education channels. Then what would the conventional universities do? There is an answer to this puzzle. Universities must engage in interdisciplinary action-research and basic research in order to discover the needs of the people, the natural resources available for social and economic advancement, and the ways of putting the two together. This country has enormous biodiversity which needs to be protected and used for better socio-economic returns. We are rich in sunlight and in wind energy. Even the agro-wastes can give us alternative energy-sources. A greedy world has mostly exhausted non-renewable energy sources and we must face this challenge. Occupations based on agriculture, non-farm products and overall rural development are eagerly awaiting educated interventions in an appropriate manner. Universities need to respond positively and urgently to this demand for the progressive transformation of our rural life. If India has to live with self-respect in the comity of nations, it will have to be through rural transformation where 65 per cent of our population resides. The universities must take up this challenge.

The main objective of university education has always been to promote the upward mobility of the population. Are the universities doing this? The major concern of the universities should, therefore, be to critically examine this matter. They must truly energize scholars to make fundamental contributions to the advancement of knowledge both for immediate use and for future progress. It must also be recognized that in any democratic society, the needs and demands of development differ from group to group, from person to person. Both scholars and students require freedom of choice about what to learn, what to teach, and how to provide equal educational opportunity for all. This is no doubt an intricate puzzle. But it must be solved by our intellectuals in collaboration with the commonalty, in the interest of both.

The Radhakrishnan Commission had pointed out in its concluding paragraphs that “Education is no exotic in India” It had quoted Professor F.W. Thomas who said “ There is no country where the love of learning has so early an origin or has exercised so lasting and powerful an influence”. This is our plus point. But the Commission has highlighted our problems also. It says, “we are to-day faced with great problems, national and social, the acquisition of economic independence, the increase of general prosperity, the attainment of an effective democracy over-riding the distinctions of caste and creed, rich and poor, and a rise in the level of culture. For the quick and effective realization of these aims, education is a powerful weapon, if it is organized efficiently and in the public interest. As we claim to be a civilized people, we must regard the higher education of the rising generation as one of our principal concerns”. (P 591, Vol I)

This concluding observation of the University Education Commission (1948-49) should continue to provide us with self-confidence as well as the direction in which our universities must proceed. India certainly has the foundational strength to face the new millenium. But there are weaknesses also which must be overcome. In this regard, I would bring to your notice what the Oxford-based eminent historian Eric Hobsbaum has said in his recently published book “On the Edge of the New Century”. I quote, “In some ways, India has an extremely promising future, principally because it has a degree of originality in the field of technology and intellectual research, which for historical reasons, is not to be found in the Far East. For example, the Indians have had a very important philosophical and mathematical tradition. In the modern society based on technology, intellectual originality has enormous potential”. But Hobsbaum further says, “India’s great difficulty is that the State is considerably weak in its structures, administrative abil-

ity, and political system. But economically and culturally, I think India has a brilliant future, more than other countries in the Far East". While Professor Hobsbaum's laudatory remarks about us should make us feel happy, his analysis of the nature of the Indian State should make us sit up and take notice.

The challenges before us are many. We must get ready to manage the loads of information and styles of communication which new technology has begun to generate. Technological change, scientific research, cultural upheavals would gather momentum all the world over within the next decade. What we have to-day would be obsolete in a short span of time. New types of production, new employment opportunities, unheard of in the past, will be seen growing in a few years' time. We must decide whether our universities remain mere onlookers of a world-wide metamorphosis or whether they help India become its proud participant.

Thirty-five years ago, the Kothari Commission had warned us, "we must either build a sound, balanced, effective and imaginative educational system to meet our developing needs and respond to our challenging aspirations or be content to be swept aside by the strong currents of history." We did not heed this warning. Now we are afraid that we would be swept aside by the new forces of information technology, globalization of markets and synthesization of cultures worldwide. The question is whether we can act fast enough to retain our national dignity and originality. Let us hope that our universities and particularly the Shivaji University take the lead in this transformation and give the younger generation the 'education service' it needs, to transform its own life and that of its society.

My best wishes go with this university and with the young persons who have become its new alumni at this Convocation.

Thank you

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