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SOCIAL EQUALITY AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE-ROLE
OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION”

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Mr. Vice-Chancellor and Members of the University Community of the Shivaji University,

I have great pleasure in joining you in celebrating your Fifth Annual Convocation today. Your University came into existence on the 1st of September, 1962 and has yet to complete the first decade of its career. I come from the University of Bombay which is more than 110 years old. Before I begin my Convocation Address, I would like to convey to you Mr. Vice-Chancellor and the members of your university community greetings and best wishes from the members of the Bombay University. We in Bombay have inherited a glorious tradition from the past and naturally our earnest endeavour always is to see that the pursuit of our curricular, extra-curricular and administrative life should be worthy of the past and should, if possible, add to our rich inheritance. The university community at Kolhapur, on the other hand, is engaged in the enviable task of building up a new tradition which would do credit to any university in our country. Under the wise and dynamic guidance of your Vice-Chancellor, your University has, during its first six years, registered a remarkable development in various disciplines and has earned a reputation of being progressive centre of learning. The sense of participation in creating a new tradition has its own special attraction and it is, therefore, not surprising that the development of your University has witnessed a joint endeavour in which not only the students and teachers of the University but even the general public of Kolhapur under the leadership of the President of the Municipal Borough took active part. *Shram hana* made by Principals, Head-Masters, members of the staff and students of the colleges and even schools and many citizens, which has led to the development of the University Campus, constitutes a chapter in the history of your six years' existence of which you should be legitimately proud. I have, therefore, great pleasure in conveying to you all the "felicitations and best wishes from the university community at Bombay.

The Function of the Regional Universities.

Your University is, in a sense, a regional university and as 'such it has certain special obligations to discharge. Like all other universities, it is no doubt the primary duty of your University, to enable its students to reach peaks of excellence in the 'different disciplines of their choice. As you know, the frontiers of knowledge have expanded during the last three quarters of a century in a phenomenal manner and so it has become the paramount duty of every seat of higher learning to make a consistent effort to enable the student community to join in this race for knowledge. Search for truth and effort to reach excellence are, no doubt, the first and primary obligations of every university. The record of your University in this matter is commendable.

As a regional university, however, you have certain special functions to discharge. It is your duty, as enlightened members of a regional university, to make an intensive study of the hopes and aspirations, the needs and requirements, of the region where you function. It is now well recognized by modern educationists that regional universities have to play a significant part in the growth and development of the region in which they are established. The social and economic development of the region should be their concern; and it, would, therefore, be necessary for such universities so to organise the courses of their studies in science and technology that their graduates would play a significant role in the improvement-social and economic-of the region which they are expected to serve. Regional universities should wisely choose suitable projects; for research of a socio-economic character and should place considerable emphasis on the significance and importance of field studies and; extension work. If this obligation of the regional universities is adequately discharged by them, it would, in a large measure, contribute not only to the educational and cultural development of the region, but also to its economic and social improvement. I feel confident that your University is fully conscious of this special function and during the last; six years you have made consistent efforts to discharge this function,

The fact that your University has organised several gram village camps"; speaks for the vision and imagination with which the functioning of your University has been guided.¹ You believe in taking the University to the people and giving the people the benefit of higher education without necessarily qualifying them to receive academic degrees., Tt: Board of Extra-Mural Studies which your University has establishes';, has adopted a motto: which is full of significance. Says this motto Taking the University to the people; making them education-minded and educating the parents." I am very happy to know that the gram'

shibirs which have been held in villages and small towns from time to time have served their purpose and I hope and trust that this wise and novel experiment will be continued on a larger scale so that your University will have taken the basic principles of higher education to the doors of the economically and socially weaker sections of the citizens staying in villages and small towns.

Your motto is “ ज्ञानमेवामृतम्.” Wisdom is the nectar of life. It is wisdom which is your ideal and not merely pedantic knowledge. As Cowper has said : “ Knowledge is proud that it knows so much, while wisdom is humble that it knows no more.” It is this wisdom which your motto declares is the nectar of life. It is this wisdom which is the source of strength of any community, and it is this wisdom which constitutes the real wealth, power and pride of any community.

In ancient India this wisdom and its functions were clearly defined. It was said : विद्या या विमुक्तये That is wisdom which releases the human mind from smallness, pettiness or narrowness. Today when we see several narrow, divisive forces raising their ugly heads, it is essential for us to remember that educated men must make a sustained effort to release the minds of citizens from narrow, divisive loyalties. If you believe, as your motto requires you to believe, that wisdom is the nectar of life, then it must be the unceasing effort of your teachers so to educate the students that when they leave the portals of the University their minds will be broad, tolerant and progressive, and will not suffer from any narrowness, pettiness or smallness born out of small loyalties to caste, creed, religion, language or region. That is one aspect of wisdom as our ancients saw it.

The other aspect of wisdom is : यः क्रियावानस पण्डितः I Wisdom which thrives merely in an ivory tower and struts on the stage of life with pride and conceit tends to become pedantic and is isolated from the national stream of life; it is mere knowledge, it is not wisdom at all. He alone can be said to be wise who, by his conduct, helps the growth and development of the community around him. The university community, which claims to be the intellectual leader of the society, must never forget that its significance to the society will be judged only by the extent to which it renders assistance to the community at large. Universities and university communities can no longer live in an ivory tower. University education is and must be a catalyst of a changing social order. It is an instrument with which socio-economic revolution has to be brought about in a democratic way; and so, wisdom which is the nectar of life requires that wise educated men leaving the portals of the Shivaji University must translate their wisdom into action dedicated to the service of the community at large. That is another ancient concept about the true nature and purpose of wisdom. In this connection, may I remind you of the motto which ‘the Bombay University carries on its crest ? Our motto is : शीलवृत्तकला विद्या

I The test of wisdom lies in the character and conduct of V the wise man. To the graduates of the Shivaji University I would Suggest that-in order to give effect to the philosophy underlying the motto ज्ञानमेवामृतम्? it maybe useful to correlate it with the motto I, 'शीलकृत्तकला विद्या' This harmonious combination of the two mottoes will give you, the graduates of the Shivaji University, an adequate idea as to what your University expects you to do when you join the battle of life.

The Role of Universities in creating a New Social Order

We all know that ever since we became politically free and particularly since we adopted the Constitution, our country has been engaged on the exciting adventure of creating KU a new social order based on justice political, social and economic. Let us remember that the Indian community today, by and large, is a traditional community. It is scripture-bound, backward-looking, leaning on superstition and believing in compliance. with age-old traditions, customs and beliefs. To convert this traditional community into a new open society which looks forward, which leans on reason and which believes in introducing social equality and economic balance in its structure, is a very difficult task. In this task, the :niversity men and women must play an important role. That is the need of the hour.

In order to create a new social order, the university community must recognize the importance of adopting a rational and scientific approach to all social and economic problems. Obscurantism is the worst enemy of modernism. Obscurantism is an attitude of mind which is prone to accept faiths and beliefs without testing them by reason. Modernism requires that every principle, faith, or belief I: must be tested by reason. Rational and scientific outlook is thus t the foundation of the new way of life on which our efforts to create?: a new social order must be founded. "With too many of us," said: Ranade, " a thing is true or false, righteous or sinful, simply because h somebody in the past has said that it is so. Duties and obligations atef duties and obligations, not because we feel them, to be so, but because, somebody reputed to be wise has laid it down that they are .whenr we abandon ourselves entirely to this helpless dependence on other wills,' it is no wonder that we become helpless as children in all departments of life, (kellock 94.)

1. James Kellock, *Mahadev Govind Ranade Patriot and Social servant*. Calcutta : Association Press. 1962.94

It is of utmost importance to realise that in the discussion and decision of the complex and complicated social and economic issues which we face today scriptures or religious texts have no relevance.. To identify the problems and to find their solutions, reason alone must be our guide, and the exercise of reason which helps in that process must be regulated by the test of experience. That is the essence of a rational and scientific approach to life. University education must inculcate in the minds of the University community a sense of dedication to a rational and scientific approach. When that is done, our students will adopt the same approach when they are called upon to solve the many problems which will face them in future.

In attempting to create a new social order it is also necessary to remember another important principle. When you create a new social order, you are not attempting to revive the past; you are attempting to remove the social injustice and economic imbalance from which the social structure suffers today and so it would be futile : to look to the past with a view to recreate it today. 'I do not dispute the fact that social and economic institutions of any community tend to carry an element of continuity. This element of continuity is often invisible, but it is indestructible. Between the past, the present and the future this thread of continuity is always bound to prevail. Nevertheless, social reformers must take care to see that in a living organisation like society, revival in the full sense is both impossible and, undesirable'. Whatever is unreasonable, objectionable, unfair and unjust in the past must be burnt and buried along with the past and need not be revived. It is only such part of the legacy of the past which, according to reason, is consistent with the ideal of social equality and economic justice that should be maintained; and whatever seems to be socially unjust and economically unfair must be ruthlessly weeded out. An attempt to create a new social order, therefore, calls for a crusading spirit, a spirit which is restless and impatient, a spirit which is determined to be engaged in the task of bringing about the realisation of the dream, a spirit which will move the general community effectively and invite it to join in the general adventure of creating a new social order. That is the ideal which the Indian Constitution has placed before us and in the achievement of that ideal, the university community must play a significant role.

Social Equality

The basic postulate of the new social order is social equality. It is well known that the Hindu community is torn by castes and subcastes and suffers from the curse of untouchability. When I speak of the basic postulate of the new

social order, I feel confident that the sentiments which I express will receive a prompt response not only from the university community of the Shivaji University, but from the general public in this region. In the history of modern Maharashtra, Kolhapur occupies a place of pride. At Kolhapur, for several decades, fine arts have thrived, music has flourished, literature has blossomed and progressive social thoughts have been articulated. Any gathering of educated citizens in this region will spontaneously pay a respectful homage to the memory of social revolutionaries who made the life of modern Maharashtra an envy for the rest of the country- Jyotiba Phule, the social and political revolutionary, a man of vision, a man of dynamic philosophy and, above all, a man of action; Agarkar, the great intellectual who preached the integrated philosophy of national life which emphasised with equal vehemence the need for social reform, political freedom and economic justice; Ranade, the philosopher, friend and guide of the movement of Indian renaissance in all its aspects; Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur, who unfurled the banner of social revolution and guided the movement for social reform throughout his stormy life; Karve, whose long life constituted a saga in the cause of the service of women, their education, and the improvement of their lot; and Vitthal Ramji Shinde, who spent all his life in the service of the depressed and the down-trodden. It is the message of these stalwarts which must be ringing in the ears of the citizens of this region and so I feel confident that my plea for social justice will receive a prompt and generous response from all of you.

In the historical past the caste system might have been founded on the basis of occupations. That is a universal phenomenon witnessed in the history of the human race in its primitive stages. But as a result of the evergrowing importance of rituals in the Hindu community, castes multiplied in numbers, assumed rigidity and have lost all relevance to the social structure, and needs of today. Castes and sub-castes create narrow, exclusive loyalties and prevent the growth of a sense of brotherhood amongst the citizens of the country. The university community must, in my opinion, carry on a crusade against the narrow loyalties of these castes and make a sustained effort to abolish these castes and subcastes. Loyalty to caste and subcaste is clearly inconsistent with the loyalty to the general community on which alone the edifice of Indian democracy can securely rest.

Social equality is not merely an urban problem; its more agonizing aspect is to be found in the rural areas. The Hindu community of Maharashtra can broadly be divided into the majority community, the 'advanced community and the socially, educationally and economically backward community. Members of the majority community and the advanced community living in urban areas have gradually, though not completely, have recognized the importance of social equality and by and large seem to practise it in their individual and collective lives. But the

backward communities consisting mainly of the Harijans living in urban areas as well as in rural areas have yet to realise as a fact this doctrine of social equality in their day to day life. It is no good our confining our vision to the problem of social equality within the narrow bounds of urban areas or big cities; our vision must extend to the rural areas and we must ask ourselves whether the promise which social revolutionaries in Maharashtra made many years ago and the declaration which has been solemnly enshrined in the Constitution have become a reality so far as the Harijan community residing in rural and urban areas is concerned. All talk of social equality, carried on by the intellectuals of the majority community or the advanced community in urban areas living fairly comfortable and well regulated lives, sounds hollow and meaningless to the Harijans spread over the outskirts both in urban and rural areas. It is a great pity that the call for social reform and social revolution which received a large measure of response in pre-freedom days does not evoke any enthusiasm today. The university community has to take up this worthy though neglected cause and pursue it with all its zeal until social equality becomes a reality in the lives of all citizens of India in general and of this region in particular. It should be the ambition of the Shivaji University, which has on its rolls many young promising students from the majority community and the socially and economically weaker community, to produce social revolutionaries who will make a determined effort to carry the message of social equality to the villages all around. Let us remember that social equality cannot be achieved or enforced merely by the coercive process of law; the dream of social equality can be realised only if superstitious beliefs which often create tensions between members of the advanced and majority communities on the one hand and members of the Harijan community on the other in different villages are cured and conquered by education. This process may turn out to be slow; but it is the enduring process to achieve our aim.

Economic Justice

Social equality and political justice do not, by themselves, complete the constituents of the new social order. Economic justice is the third and a very important constituent of the new social order. Even after 20 years of political freedom the problem of poverty still remains mainly unsolved. In urban areas middle class people loudly complain about the rise in prices, about the scarcity of necessary commodities and about other hardships that they have to suffer. But we rarely recognize that the dumb sufferings of the landless labourers and homeless Harijans residing in urban and rural areas are a disgrace to our democracy, which boasts that it is founded on social, economic and political justice. Unless the problem of poverty of millions of our citizens staying in our villages and smaller towns is adequately tackled, the dream of creating a new social order will be just

a dream and no more. “ You cannot have “, said Ranade, “ a good social system when you find yourself low in the scale of political rights, nor can you be fit to exercise political, rights and privileges unless your social system is based on reason and justice. You cannot have a good economical system when your social arrangements are imperfect. If your religious ideals are low and grovelling, you cannot succeed in social economical or political spheres, This inter-dependence is not an accident, but is, the law of our nature”² **These prophetic words uttered** by Ranade as early as 1900 give briefly, effectively and eloquently the ,basic concept on which the creation of a new social order must be founded.

The Need to create a Sense of Ethos

As I am talking to you about our commitment to the ideal of creating a new social order in our country,! cannot overlook the fact that our country today seems to be facing it crisis of character. Words which inspired vigorous, revolutionary action in the past seem to have lost their meaning today; and revolutionary ideas sound like platitudes. The community at large seems tragically to have lost the sense of purpose, and despair, frustration and anger seem to overtake us all. At such an hour of trial.it is the duty of the university community to create a sense of ethos, a sense of purpose. a sense of dedication to the cause of the service of the community .This can best be done if the members of the university community themselves believe in the basic concepts of the University’s mission in relation to the task of creating a new social order and give proof o’f their belief not merely by words but by action in their individual and collective lives. It is our duty to educate the masses and create in their minds a passionate belief in the proper sense of values. It is our duty to educate the masses and make them conscious of their rights and their obligations. It is our duty to start and guide a crusading movement for the establishment of social equality and the removal of economic injustice. This adventure calls for the best in us, calls for, a spirit of dedication. I have no doubt that the university community of the Shivaji University will respond to my appeal. May I remindyou that you have the proud privilege of bearing the name of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, whose life, achievements and philosophy stand for the very best in Indian culture and Indian sense of values. Let ms remember that the crisis which we are facing today can be resolved and the democratic way of life and the sense of values on which it is founded can be sustained only if all of us join in the crusade to create a new social order. What is the true picture of this new social order ?, you may ask me. Let me answer this question again in the words of Ranade:

“With a liberated manhood, with buoyant hope, with a faith ihat never shirks duty, with a sense of justice that deals fairly to all, with unclouded intellect and powers

fully cultivated, and, lastly, with a love that overleaps all bounds, renovated India will take her proper rank among the nations of the world, and be the master of the situation and of her own destiny. This is the goal to be reached-this is the promised land. Happy are they who see it in distant vision; happier those who are permitted to work and clear the way on to it; happiest they who live to see it with their eyes and tread upon the holy soil once more".³

Whilst wishing this year's graduates of the Shivaji University a happy, fruitful and purposeful future, let me express the hope that the Shivaji University will make a substantial contribution to the realisation of the dream which Ranade has so eloquently expressed. If the teachers and students of the Shivaji University under the able guidance of their Vice-Chancellor make a sustained effort to assist the community of the region in its endeavour to enable all the citizens in the region to enjoy life, liberty and happiness, they will leave to their successors a legacy of which they would be justly proud.

