

**Dr. Satish Chandra,**

*Chairman*

*University Grants Commission, New Delhi*

*Dt.29-11-1977*

---

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, recipients of Degrees, Ladies and Gentlemen :

I am deeply beholden to the Vice-Chancellor, Prof. P. G. Patil, and to the authorities of the Shivaji University, Kolhapur, for inviting me to address this Convocation. Although Kolhapur city is a historic town and is located, in picturesque surroundings, I have never had an opportunity of visiting your beautiful campus earlier. I am grateful to the University for having provided me this opportunity. As a humble student of history, I am of course familiar with the role Kolhapur has played in the rise and development of the Maratha empire under the aegis of the great statesman and patriot, Shivaji, and his successors. With the rise of the Peshwas, Kolhapur tended to take a back seat in the affairs of the Maratha State and, to that extent, scholars of Maratha history have tended to neglect and underestimate the historic role of Kolhapur. Students of history are deeply beholden to Dr. A. G. Pawar, an erudite scholar and an able administrator, who took a lead in publishing the records contained in the Kolhapur State Archives. I hope that the tradition established by Dr. Pawar will be carried forward by the Department of History. As you are aware, the focus of historical writings has shifted from the doings of the powerful and the mighty to the pattern of life of the common people and the patterns and phases of the growth and evolution of society and culture. This needs a new approach towards historical sources. Not only official records but family records, district and taluqa records, demographic trends, droughts and epidemics etc., become relevant for the social historian. Hence they have to be searched for, collected and made available to the scholarly world. Local traditions, folk songs, folk stories etc, can also play a useful role in reconstructing the pattern of life, especially, life in the rural areas. The disciplines of Sociology, Social Anthropology, Ethnography etc., have to be fully drawn upon by the historians for the purpose. Thus, an inter-disciplinary approach becomes necessary. The UGC has commended the idea of Schools whereby existing Departments could be brought together under a loose, flexible organisation for the study of common problems. Regional or sub-regional history and culture could provide the basis for a School of historical sciences. I hope that the academic community will seriously consider this idea and other programmes which can make research more meaningful. On its part, the UGC will not be backward in providing encouragement and support to innovate programmes.

Although the Shivaji University has not yet been able to fully utilise the funds allocated to it by the UGC under the first phase of the Fifth Five-Year Plan,

the main shortfall being in the sphere of building programmes and, to some extent, faculty expansion, bearing in mind the over-all needs of the University, the Commission has agreed to books and equipment under the second phase of the Plan and also agreed to a number of other proposals. I hope that the University will be able to fully utilise its funds so that it can emerge as a leading institution in the field of higher education in the region.

The nation today is in the mood of reviewing its achievements and shortcomings during the last 30 years before it resumes its onward march. Such occasions are necessary and useful in a nation's history, and need to be carried out at all levels, with honesty and fearlessness. In this context, one of the problems which, in my opinion, needs to be discussed is the role of the newly established Universities in the States.

As we know, there has been a rapid expansion of higher education in the country. This rapid expansion has led to the establishment of many sub-standard institutions which are hardly in a position to maintain standards. Moreover, many of these institutions have copied courses from each other. Thus, the situation is marked by a high degree of conformity and a distrust of experimentation, change and innovation. The newly established regional Universities have some added disadvantages. Quite often, they have come into being after a local agitation. This leads to high expectations that they could satisfy not only the educational needs of the regions, enrich cultural and intellectual life, but also promote the economic and social development of the region. On the other hand, few of them have been provided with the necessary academic and financial means and the administrative infrastructure to satisfy these expectations even to a limited extent. Thus, discontent and frustration marks many of these Universities, with an even more marked paucity of resources. Can anything be done to raise these Universities to a high level of academic functioning? In order to do so, it may be first useful to try to define the role of these Universities.

First, it should be kept in mind that several of these Universities are located in regions which are relatively backward, economically and, sometimes, educationally and culturally as well. Also, they are generally isolated geographically, being located in that part of the state which is relatively less accessible or is not well served by the communication network. As a result, such Universities have a feeling of academic isolation, and often find it difficult to attract good students, or to attract and retain competent staff. Isolation from the academic main-stream in turn leads to parochialism in approach, irrelevance and sometimes acceptance of lower standards. Of course, these disadvantages can be counter balanced by a closer community life, a greater sense of involvement in the developmental needs of the region, and fewer tensions in daily life, which are inescapable features of life in large towns.

It is clear that both State Governments and the U. G. C. should pay special attention to the problem of Universities located in backward regions, so that these Universities are enabled to play a more meaningful role in the economic, social and cultural development of the region, and are in a position to make a larger contribution to the expansion of knowledge and the pursuit of excellence. However, State Governments and the UGC can provide greater help to the regional Universities only if they are prepared to help themselves. For this, the first need is an innovative approach towards courses. A sustained effort is necessary to re-orient the courses in order to make them more relevant to the needs of the community. The U.G.C. is of the view that it should be possible at the under-graduate stage to orient one of the three elective subjects towards an application or field-oriented study. For instance, Chemistry can be combined with the study of Agro-Chemicals including Fertilizers; Botany with Plant Protection and Horti-culture; Zoology with fisheries; Commerce with Agricultural Marketing, Farm Management etc. This programme is different from the earlier one of setting up rural institutes of higher education which provided training for employment in the rural sector. Since such jobs could not be guaranteed, the scheme did not succeed and had to be abandoned. In the new approach, the two traditional subjects will continue to be dealt with at the highest academic level. Students opting for these courses will be entitled for admission to postgraduate courses in the two academic subjects if their performance is satisfactory. There will be no fall in standards and students will remain in the academic mainstream. In fact, their training in practical or field courses would give them a better grasp of theory and provide them with more job opportunities. This idea of restructuring of course, could be experimented with in smaller, regional Universities which are sometimes less hide-bound in their outlook than the older Universities. Regional Universities could also provide leadership in introducing field oriented programmes in selected colleges affiliated to them.

The second problem facing regional Universities is of attracting and retaining highly qualified faculty members and good students. The two problems are necessarily interconnected. One obvious solution is the provision of the necessary academic infra structure, such as good library and laboratory facilities without which high quality research and teaching are hardly possible. In the present Five-Year Plan, the UGC has laid considerable emphasis on this aspect. It has earmarked about 40% of its development grant for books and equipment. Grants for books and equipment under the second phase of the Plan have already been released. In fact, I would like to say, wherever a University has made out a case for supplementary grants for books and equipment, the Commission has never turned it down on financial grounds, it is a different matter that many Universities have

not been able to utilise these grants fully in the best manner. Apart from faculty commitment and the working of the library, this is often due to a weak administrative infrastructure of these Universities. It is wasteful to ask a highly qualified faculty member to do clerical chores, or to discharge functions which could be carried out at much lower cost by administrative and supporting staff. Such, however, has been the situation in many of the newly established Universities. While setting up new Universities State Governments 'have sometimes paid scant attention to the need of administrative and supporting staff in Departments. This initial imbalance between academic and administrative staff has tended to be further aggravated, because the faculty strength of Departments has increased with the help of the UGC, but the administrative and supporting services have not been augmented, since that is the exclusive responsibility of the State Governments. Complaints have been received from some Universities that Departments do not have the requisite staff for correspondence or for typing research papers, or for processing and placing orders for the needed equipment. Sometimes these processes are so highly centralised that Heads of Departments find their hands completely tied. The situation varies considerably from State to State, and from university to university, but it may be desirable for the Commission and the State Governments to make an enquiry into the administrative infrastructure of Universities, specially the regional Universities, so that faculty members could operate at maximum efficiency. As nonplan expenditure grows, the need for integrating plan and non-plan expenditure becomes ever more necessary. While it may be difficult for the U. G. C. to provide for the administrative and supporting staff in the Universities out of the Plan funds placed at its disposal, it would like to discuss this matter with the State Governments so that an overview could be taken. As far as research projects funded by the Commission are concerned, there is already a provision, that a part of the contingency expenditure can be utilised for paying the administrative and supportin stall, cither on a whole time or a part time basis.

In addition to the above, there is urgent need for pioviding other facilities to the faculty such as housing, medical facilities etc. Here again, the needs of regional Universities may have to be examined separately by the University Grants Commission. Attempts should be made to persuade Government that loan facilities provided by Life Insurance Corporation, Housing Board, Nationalised Banks etc., should be expanded to cover University and College teachers. As far as students are concerned, the U.G.C. is already providing for hostel facilities as well as facilities for canteens, student homes (in case a University is located far away from the city ), Non-Resident Students Centres, play fields etc. Here again, the various nationalised loaning agencies can be asked to help. These measures,

while desirable, may not be able to overcome the sense of intellectual isolation from which faculty members and students in regional Universities often suffer. No easy solution to this problem can be visualised as long as regional Universities are not able to develop as centres of excellence, because basically inter-action has always to be on basis of equality. However, a number of steps can be which could help in raising standards and also permit greater inter-action. Towards this end, the following suggestions could be considered :

- ij) The provision for joint faculty appointments so that the services of highly qualified faculty members could be shared between more than one university, Such a practice obtains in a number of developed countries and there seems no reason why it cannot be adopted by a number of regional Universities to mutual advantage.
- ii) Programmes of visiting faculty, associate etc., which have been spelt out by the U. G. C. need to be utilised more fully. Under these schemes, faculty members can be invited for short or long term periods from Universities or other institutions of higher learning. Similarly, associateships can be utilised by faculty members for spending some periods of time in other Universities and institutions of higher learning, including national laboratories. For the purpose, Universities will have to provide the necessary flexibility in their leave rules.
- in) Provision whereby students could spend one semester or part of it in another University or institution of higher learning, and the work done there is given due recognition by the parent University. This could best be done by transfer of credits. This, in turn, would imply moving over from the present system of numerical marking to the grading system, and to the adoption of the semester system where greater flexibility in course work is possible.
- iv) Holding of seminars, workshops, summer institutes etc. To facilitate these in out-of-the-way regional Universities, the Commission has finalised a scheme whereby these Universities would be helped to develop a faculty complex with accommodation for visiting scholars and academics for limited periods. It would also contain provision for seminar rooms, conference halls, a dining room etc. It is proposed to start this scheme in the next Plan, or even earlier, if funds permit. Facilities of a similar type could, be extended to the students working in neighbouring Universities for short periods.

Third, regional Universities will have to develop forms where they could inter-act more closely with the community outside the University for their social, economic and cultural development. The concept of area planning has been put forward by the new Planning Commission. Experience has shown that centralised planning cannot succeed if the objective is the removal of social and economic disparities. This problem has to be considered in the context of the broad social

and economic objectives set out by the Janata Government, headed by Shri Morarji Desai. The Commission, in its note to the Government on the development of education in the country during the next decade or so, has underlined the role of the Universities in developmental activities. If centralised planning has to be supported and supplemented by planning at the grassroot level, i.e., planning at the district or even at the block level, University Departments of Geography, Economics, Sociology, Education etc., can play a meaningful role in the process. Here again, regional Universities with close associations with the local community can provide leadership by reorienting the work of their Departments This would also provide a new focus to their research work.

Social and economic development of a region must be accompanied by a study of regional cultural traditions and developments. It is unfortunate that Universities have often existed as cultural islands, unmindful of and even disdainful of the cultural forms and traditions of the region in which a University is located. The unique feature of Indian culture is 'unity in diversity.' While studying our national culture, regional Universities ought to pay adequate attention to regional diversities. Even sadder is the neglect of rural and folk art forms. The Commission has recently, with the help of expert committees, invited a number of Universities to set up faculties of creative arts so that students are made more aware of our cultural and historic traditions and forms. The study of rural folk forms would be an integral part of the work of these Departments. This again is a field in which regional Universities could provide a lead.

Lastly, regional Universities should adopt a more vigorous programme for the academic and general development of colleges affiliated to them. Shivaji University, for instance, which shares some, if not all the characteristics of regional Universities, is responsible for the educational development of a compact region viz., the districts of Southern Maharashtra, Kolhapur, Sangli, Satara and Sholapur. Unlike many of the other affiliating Universities, it has only 84 affiliated colleges. I might recall that both the Radhakrishnan University Commission and the Education Commission headed by Dr. D. S. Kothari had suggested 30 affiliated colleges as an optimum size. Universities are often neglectful of the developmental needs of the colleges affiliated to them and are also deficient in providing the necessary academic leadership. I am happy to learn that Shivaji University has taken steps for setting up University departments for postgraduate studies in the districts under its jurisdiction. I wish every success to this experiment which would be watched keenly by the Commission as well by other Universities which have a problem of maintaining standards of postgraduate education. The University could undertake a districtwise survey of the colleges affiliated to it to assess their concrete problems and needs. The University Leadership Programme of the Commission, Summer Institutes etc., will help Universities to raise

standards.in colleges. The University might also set up a College Development Council which would link the University more closely with the developmental needs and requirements of the affiliated colleges. The U. G. C. guidelines in the matter have already been communicated to the University. Thus, regional Universities can make a distinct contribution in the field of higher education if they adopt innovative programmes, including field oriented courses, reexamine their procedures of appointment, emphasising greater inter-action with neighbouring institutions of higher learning with greater movement of students, pay special attention to the social, economic and cultural needs and life-forms of the people in the region and pay special attention to the academic and general development of the affiliated colleges. Let me hope that Shivaji University, Kolhapur, which has many contributions to its credit, will take a lead in this direction.

To the young graduates, men and women, who have received their degrees today, I would like to extend my cordial good wishes and congratulations. They are the harbingers of the New India of our dreams. The nation has passed through a traumatic experience from which we are still trying to recover. It is obvious that the battle for democracy is to be fought in the minds of men. It is for the Universities to uphold the values of democracy, secularism and socialism which we cherish, and it is the students who have to bear the burden and the responsibility of carrying these values to the people and fighting for them fearlessly. Fearlessness, as our Prime Minister, Shri Morarji Desai, has said, is the greatest value which we need to inculcate. With these words, I would once again like to offer my hearty congratulations to the graduates and to all those who have received their degrees in this Convocation.

□□□