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ADDRESS BY
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VICE- CHANCELLOR, MEMBERS OF FACULTY, STAFF AND STUDENTS OF JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY, DISTINGUISHED FORMER STUDENTS AND CITIZENS OF CALCUTTA, REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PRESS AND ELECTRONIC MEDIA, FRIENDS,

I consider it a pleasure and privilege to address the Convocation of the Jadavpur University which began in 1906 as the National College of Education under the inspiration of one of our greatest freedom fighters, philosophers and thinkers - Sri Aurobindo, and which, over the years, has developed into an excellent centre specially for scientific and technical education. I warmly commend the Jadavpur University community for their fine record.

While working for my doctoral thesis on his political thought from the time after his return from England in 1893 until he left Calcutta for Pondicherry in 1910, I had occasion to study in some depth the astounding events which followed the *Banga Bhanga*, the partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon in 1905, it led to a political explosion that for the first time took the national movement out of the limited confines of committee rooms and into the lives and hearts of the masses. Sri Aurobindo, who was then teaching in Baroda, resigned his job and moved to Calcutta where, for a short period, he shone like a meteor against the darkness of the colonial sky. His writings and editorials in the *Bande Mataram* and the *Karmayogin* stand as unique essays, pregnant with nationalist fervour and imbued with deep spiritual power. Before I come to the theme of my address, therefore, I would like to pay my deep homage to the memory of Sri Aurobindo whose work continues to inspire succeeding generations in India and around the world.

I must also recall the significant contribution made by my old friend and colleague Dr. Triguna Sen who was the first Vice- Chancellor of Jadavpur University. We had worked together when I was Chancellor and he Vice-Chancellor of the Benaras Hindu University, and later when both of us joined Srimati Indira Gandhi's ministry way back in 1967.

Standing as we are on the threshold of a new millennium , I would like to share with you some thoughts with particular reference to the report of the UNESCO International Commission on Education for the 21st Century, of which I was a member. Education is in some ways the highest and most noble activity of the human race, and with our strong intellectual tradition going back to the *Upanishads* we must pioneer in the development of a holistic educational system for the next century. Bengal has always been the cradle of creativity in many spheres of human activity, and I hope that the Jadavpur University will be in the forefront of this exciting adventure.

As we move through the last decade of this extraordinary century, which has witnessed unparalleled destruction and unimagined progress-the cruellest mass killings in human history and the most outstanding breakthrough in human welfare, and the advent of weapons of unprecedented lethality and the creative probings of outer space - we find ourselves poised at a crucial cross-roads in the long and tortuous history of the human race on Planet Earth. In our own lifetimes time has telescoped, both for better and for worse. While scientific applications have raised living standards for millions beyond all expectations, the problems of humanity have also assumed global dimensions and millions still go hungry day after day. The persistence of nuclear testing and the disposal of nuclear wastes, the dangers of global warming and the attenuation of ozone shield, the menace of deforestation and the extinction of many species of flora and fauna, the pervasive air and water pollution and the poisoning of the food chain, the malign underworld of drugs and the alarming spread of communicable diseases; are now problems which the human race shares in common, and which are simply not amenable to solution on anything less than a global footing.

It is now quite clear that humanity is transiting into a new kind of society, a global society, though we may be too close

to the event to fully grasp its significance . The future is upon us almost before we realize that the past has disappeared, and we find ourselves precariously poised in a present full of challenge and change. Whether it is political events or economic decisions, commercial or industrial activity, computer technology or space exploration, food and dress habits or the universal musical beat, all of these have ceased to respect the artificial barriers imposed by national boundaries and, impelled by science and technology , have become global in their manifestation. We live in a shrinking world in which the malign heritage of conflict and competition and the growing gap between the developed and the developing world, will have to make way for a new culture of convergence and co-operation if the rich promise of the next millennium is not to dissolve into conflict and chaos which is already overtaking many parts of the world.

Among the areas of prime concern today are the runaway growth of population in the developing world, the threat to our natural environment and the role of the educational process in dealing with our present situation. While environmental concerns were reaffirmed at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, the entire population problem came under close scrutiny in 1994 Population Conference in Cairo. Quite clearly, we have paid a heavy price for our economic growth in the last few decades. The multi-religious Assisi Declaration on Man and Nature of 1986 is an eloquent testament to the unity of approach to these crucial problems by spiritual leaders from varied traditions. The unprecedented human intervention into the environment has upset the delicate ecological balance that enabled Mother Earth - *Bhavani Vasundhara* in the Indian tradition , *Gaia* in the Greek - to survive for billions of years and become a unique crucible for the evolution of human consciousness. Ruthless exploitation of non-renewable natural resources is creating irreversible damage, and if allowed to continue will result in a series of major ecological disasters that can extinguish life on this planet by the end of the next

century.

It is not as if we lack the spritual, intellectual and economic resources to tackle the problems. Scientific breakthrough and technological ingenuity have given us the capacity to overcome all these challenges. But what is missing is the wisdom and compassion to do so. Knowledge proliferates, but wisdom languishes. It is this yawning chasm that needs to be bridged before long if we are ever to reverse the present trend towards disaster, and it is here that the role of the United Nations system, eminent persons all over the world and the NGOs assumes vital importance. Without their active co-operation, the transition to global society will not be smooth and in fact may result in major upheavals and disastrous conflicts. They must provide the new paradigm of consciousness that human survival and progression now requires, overcoming outmoded orthodoxies and obsolescent orientations.

The astounding communications technology, which today encircles the globe, seldom uses its tremendous potential to spread global values and foster a more caring, compassionate consciousness. On the contrary, the media is full of violence and horror, cruelty and carnage, unbridled consumerism and unabashed promiscuity, which not only distorts the awarness of the young but dulls our sensitivity to the problems of human suffering and pain. What is urgently needed, therefore, is a U-turn in our educational and communications policies. We need to develop carefully structured programmes on a global scale based clearly and unequivocally on the premises that human survival involves the growth of a creative and compassionate global consciousness. The spritual dimension will have to be once again given importance in our thinking, and for this we must draw upon the great reservoir of idealism and spritual values provided by the rich and varied religious traditions of humanity.

We need the courage to think globally, to break away from traditional paradigms and plunge boldly into the future. We

must so mobilize our inner and outer resources that we begin consciously to build a new world in the 21st century based on mutually assured welfare rather than mutually assured destruction. As global citizens committed to human survival and welfare, we must structure a worldwide programme of education — for children and adults alike — that would open their eyes to the realities of the new global age that is dawning and their hearts to the anguished cry of the disadvantaged and the deprived. And there is no time to be lost. With the emergence of the global society, the sinister forces of fundamentalism and fanaticism, of exploitation and intimidation, are also gathering strength.

In the restructuring of entire educational process for the 21st century, two more factors are critical. The first is the prime importance of human resources in the process of renovation. As the report of the UNESCO International Commission on Education for the twenty-first Century (of which I was a Member) has stressed that the role of the teacher will remain critical despite the emerging technological innovations. Indeed, the very existence of this new pedagogic paradigm will involve a higher level of expertise and a constant enhancing of skills if teachers are to cope with the new challenges. The old concept of rigid curricula and routine teaching is no longer valid. In the new dispensation, the teacher will have to be intellectually motivated and academically challenged on an on-going basis. In my view it should be mandatory for all teachers to upgrade their skills on a continuing basis at least once every five years, and this will involve significant administrative and managerial devices. Even if today's teacher cannot live up to the ancient Indian concept of the *Guru* (one who dispels the darkness), yet he or she must continue to fulfil the leadership requirements and become the role model for the students.

The second aspect relates to community and family involvement in educational management. Here again, the UNESCO International Commission, chaired by Jacques Delors, has unequivocally stated that education cannot be

looked at in isolation from the social and familial environment of the child. Indeed the first school for child is the family, and the first teacher the parents. The unfortunate compartmentalisation between the family and the school on the one hand, and the school and the community on the other, is now widely prevalent. This dichotomy needs to be resolved, and the educational process once again refashioned as a joint endeavour of family and community with a creative symbiosis of both. There are several modalities for achieving it, including parent-teacher associations, community involvement and civic participation. As we move into the 21st century, with the whirlwind of changes sweeping across the world, it is necessary to further strengthen these interlinkages so that the community becomes the sheet anchor of the child's education and emotional growth.

The Delors Report probes deeply into the challenges of inculcating traditional and moral values in the educational management. It has identified four pillars of education — *Learning to know*, *Learning to do*, *Learning to be*, and *Learning to live together*. By addressing all these four dimensions effectively we can hope to structure a better society for humanity in the 21st century. *Learning to know* involves intellectual ability which will have to function on a continuing basis in this changing world of science and technology. *Learning to do* is associated with the acquisition of skills, including manual skills, that enables a person to become a creative and useful member of society. *Learning to be* is the deepest concept. It implies a movement inwards, towards the depth of our psyché to find there the light and the strength to behave as responsible and creative citizens in the emerging global society. And finally, *Learning to live together* is the very basis upon which this society has to be founded. Fanaticism, fundamentalism, exclusivism, hostility, enmity and feuding have no place in a society which is bound together now by instant communications, satellite technology and conceptual convergence. Taken together, these four pillars

represent the great challenge that all of us who claim to be educationists must boldly face.

What we need, then, is a holistic philosophy based upon the following premises :

a) That the planet we inhabit and of which we are all citizens - Planet Earth - is a single, living, pulsating entity ; that the human race in the final analysis is an interlocking, extended family — *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* as the Veda has it ; and that differences of race and religion, nationality and ideology, sex and sexual preference, economic and social are viewed in the broader context of global unity ;

b) That the ecology of Planet Earth has to be preserved from mindless destruction and ruthless exploitation, and enriched for the welfare of generations yet unborn ; and that there should be a more equitable consumption pattern based on limits to growth , not unbridled consumerism.

c) That hatred and bigotry, fundamentalism and fanaticism, greed and jealousy, whether among individuals, groups or nations are corrosive emotions which must be overcome as we move into the next century; and that love and compassion, caring and charity, friendship and co-operation are the elements that have to be encouraged as we transit into a new global awareness;

d) That the world's great religions must no longer war against each other for supremacy, but mutually co-operate for the welfare of the human race, and ,through a creative and continuing Interfaith dialogue instead of the dogma and exclusivism that divides them, the golden thread of spiritual aspiration that binds them together must be nurtured;

e) That the new, holistic education must acknowledge the multiple dimensions of human personality - physical, intellectual, aesthetic, emotional and spiritual - and seek a harmonious development of an integrated human being , and

a massive and concerted drive is needed to eradicate the scourge of illiteracy world-wide by the year 2010, with special emphasis on female literacy, particularly in the developing countries.

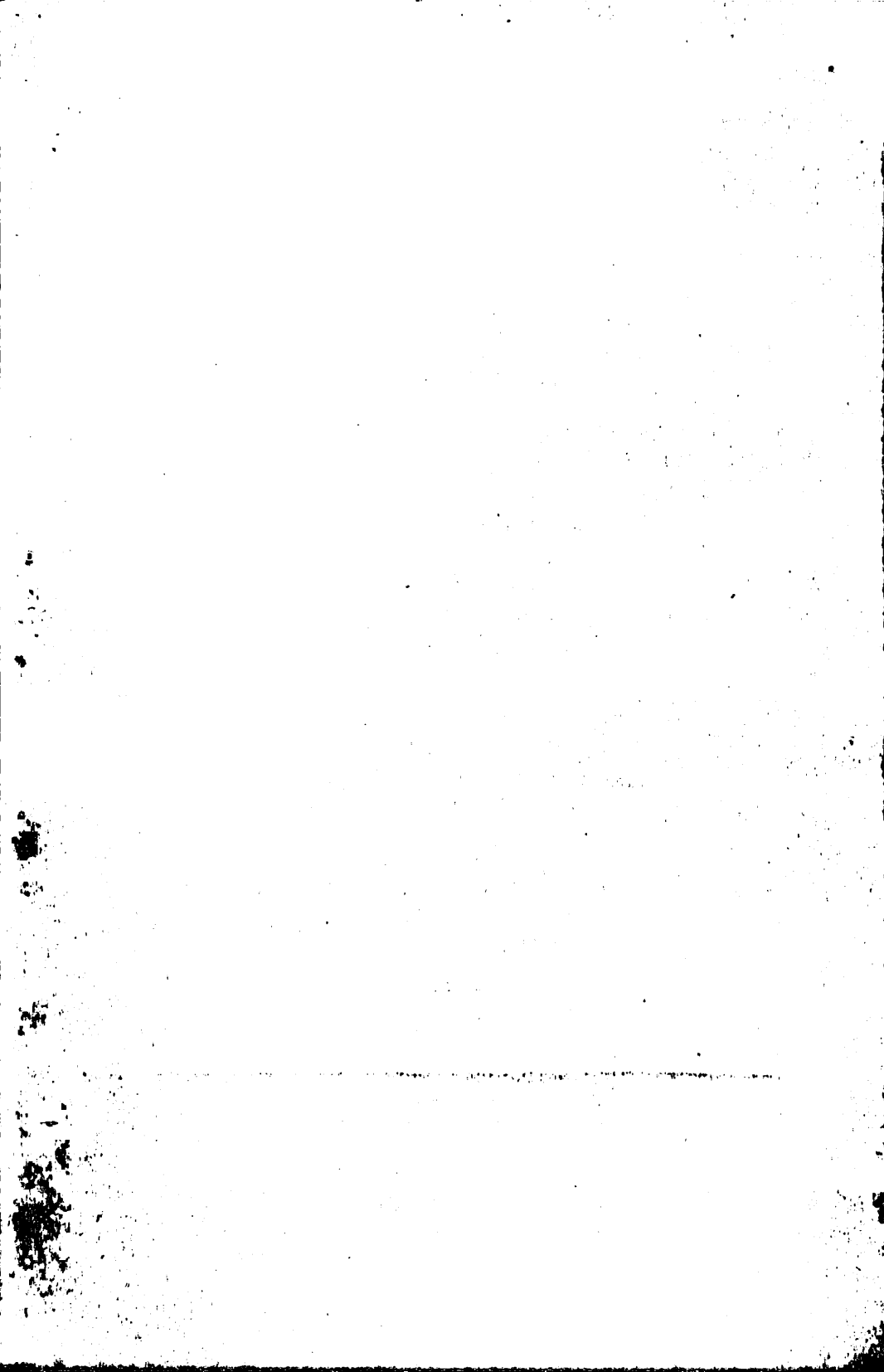
This is the vision for education in the 21st century that I venture to place before this distinguished audience. I would urge the students and teachers assembled here to ponder over these ideas and strive to fulfil the great expectations that the nation has from the younger generations as we hurtle into the future astride the irreversible arrow of time.

I wish the graduates of today all success in building a new society, a new India and a new world. There will, of course, be difficulties ahead, but difficulties are there to be overcome. There are no short cuts to greatness, either individual or collective. We must so mobilise our inner and outer resources as to make a final and decisive assault on the citadels of poverty and deprivation, deriving inspiration from the great verse of the *Katha Upanishad* that exhorts us to Arise, Awake and move boldly towards our goal across the sharp and dangerous path that lies ahead :

Uttishthata Jâgrata Prâpya Varân Nibodhata

Kshurasya Dhârâ Nishitâ Duratyayâ

Durgam Pathas tat Kavayo Vadanti



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