

SPECIAL CONVOCATION
and the
FIFTY-EIGHTH
ANNUAL CONVOCATION

24 DECEMBER 2013

ADDRESS BY

GUEST-IN-CHIEF

DR. T RAMASAMI

Secretary

Department of Science & Technology

Government of India

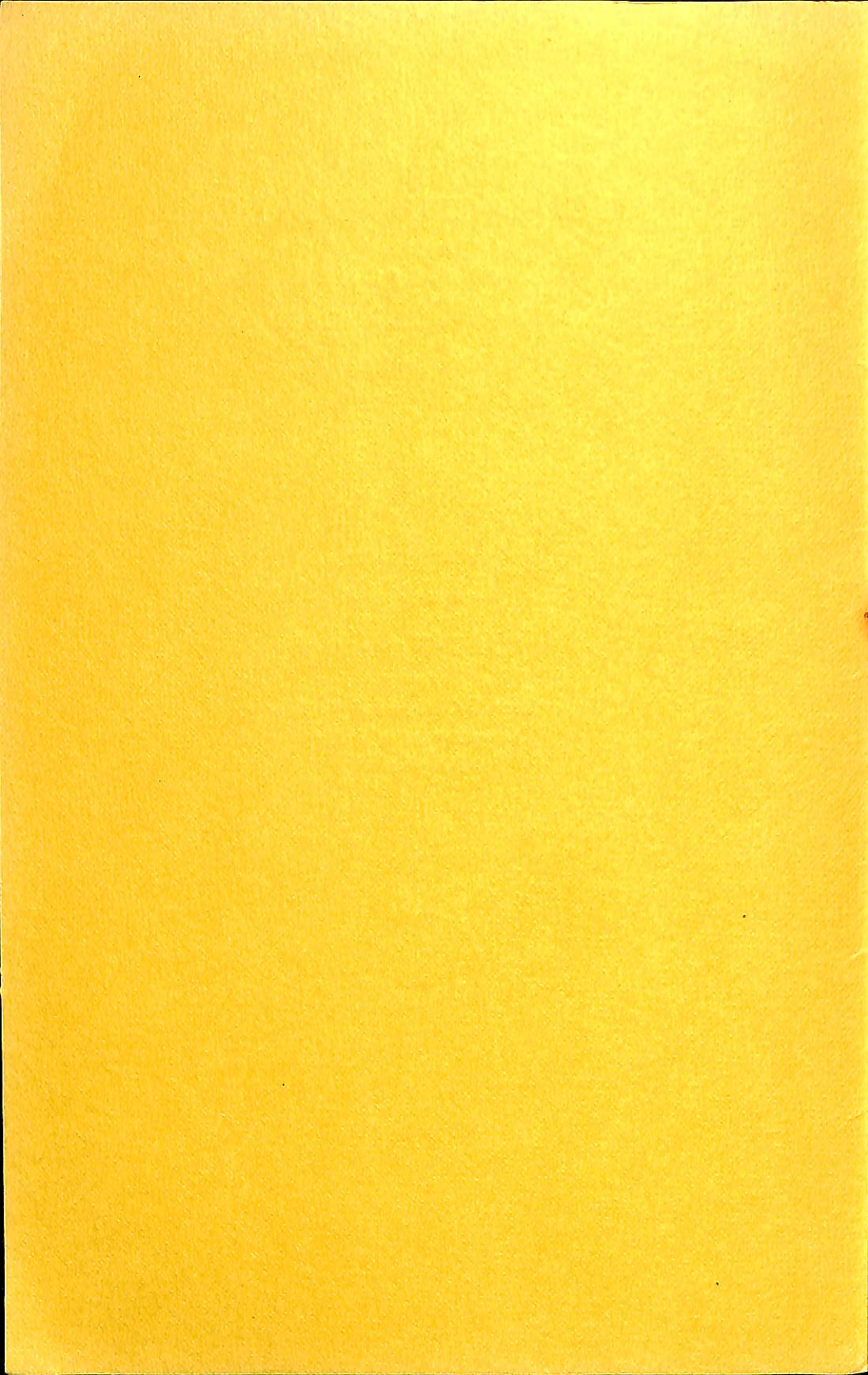
New Delhi



JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY

KOLKATA 700 032

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CONVOCATION ADDRESS

by Dr. T. Ramasami*

Preamble

Hon'ble Chancellor, Vice-chancellor, Members of the Court and Apex bodies, Distinguished Guests, Faculty, Staff and Students of the University, Parents, Representatives of the Media, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Very good day to all of you!

This convocation has been convened for conferring degrees on several of you. This occasion is special. It is a day of reckoning. Let me, therefore, congratulate the new graduands, their parents, teachers and the university and all those who have contributed to the process of education. To me, education is a process. It is a process through which the total *persona* of a human is being shaped and developed. In this, parents, teachers, learners and the learning ambience are all involved and should work in unison. Therefore, let me congratulate the culmination of an effort in unison.

Kolkata: A City with Inspirational Legacy

When I was called upon to deliver this address, I accepted without hesitation. I have always valued the city of Kolkata as a city of learning. It is a city in India where the knowledge, creative art and learning are valued as a social behaviour. It is not perhaps a coincidence that Kolkata is the seat of all Nobel prizes won for work in India. Therefore for some of us engaged in science-based knowledge activities, Kolkata is a special city. It is a city with legacy for inspired thinking and thought processes.

It is a city which gave us Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose, Satyendra Nath Bose, Meghnad Saha, Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray and many more. It is a city in which the only Nobel prize winning works of Sir

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CV Raman, Sir Ronald Ross and Mother Teresa were performed. There is something in this city which makes Kolkata special for creative work.

Jadavpur University: In the Current Context of Indian Education

There were times when the universities were the main centres of not only higher learning but also advanced research in India. However, in more recent times, universities had to meet the demands of expansion of higher learning in India. There have been concerns expressed that academic centres may lag behind in research engagement. However, Jadavpur University, in recent times, has maintained an impressive record as an active centre of research. Today, this university is one of the foremost among the performing universities in the current phase of development of India. Let me compliment the University.

Global Ranking of Universities: A Current Trend

There is now a tendency in the world to rank universities based on metrics. Such measurements are valuable and most relevant in the context of modern times. Indian universities do not figure among the “Top 100” universities in the world. Some of us are rightfully concerned. One of the measuring parameters for global ranking is the number of international students enrolled. This, to some extent, is an indicator of the education process being relevant to different social contexts and geographical needs. In other words, context-neutral component of education is also of importance. Research is expected to expand and intensify the frontier of knowledge. Scientific publications in highly peer-valued journals indicate the levels of intensification of frontier of knowledge.

Peer judgement is a honour system. In history, it seems to have worked better for assessing the intensification of knowledge within the known frontier of science. In human history, many new knowledge breakthroughs have come to be understood and appreciated many years after they were propounded. There have been instances when the breakthrough additions of new knowledge outside the known frontiers fail to earn the peer recognition. Socrates and Copernicus in scientific arena, Christ and Buddha in spiritual arena gave lessons from their lessons of universal value and came to be understood better only

in distant space of time and history. Even the power of non-violence of Gandhi came to be realised much later in the peer-review process. Otherwise, how do we explain that Nobel peace prize missed the Master? It is, however, necessary for Indian universities to measure up to the global benchmarks and indicators sooner than later.

Context-Neutral Education: Its Relevance and Excellence

Nalanda in India offered such an education several centuries ago. It remained in the forefront of all educational centres for nearly ten centuries. The university admitted more than 10,000 students every year from the global citizenry and offered education to meet the universality of both space and time.

Universality Dimensions of Education

While some elements of education need to be referenced to the context of living conditions and prevailing external environment, the holistic education should include lessons for universality of space and time. Universality dimensions of education should include “Context neutrality” and “Intergenerational value”. For some reason, I hold an opinion that metrics of measurements of educational processes and institutions do not seem to weigh adequately “Universality Dimensions of Education”. Hence, I propose to engage in conversation with you on the topic “Universality Dimensions of Education”. I propose to raise some fundamental questions regarding the role of education in the preparation of unprepared minds. Education is truly a process of mind preparation.

When the preparation of mind is focussed on meeting the needs of employment market and the demands of immediate employer, the focus is on short-time benefits. Such an education for living is restricted to the immediate contexts. Size of pay packages at the campus recruitment by potential employers become the yardsticks for measurement of educational performance. Concept of finishing schools is to prepare the under-prepared minds to suit the specific needs of the immediate employers. Would such an education process be relevant in a different social context of space and time? Do we limit the higher education to one of skill-building without adequate focus on preparation

of mind for adding value to a much larger context of time and space? To me, a measurement system for assessment of education should include also indicators of professional outcomes of education and societal impact of the learner.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy spoke of needs for knowledge which remain relevant today. Let us take the example of *Gitanjali* of Gurudev Tagore. Has it lost its sheen or relevance over time? In my opinion, the lessons from *Gitanjali* are even more relevant today than when they were conceived.

Let me quote from an address of Tagore delivered on 26th May 1921:

“ You know the traditions of our country are never to accept any material fees from the students in return to teaching, because we consider in India that one who has knowledge has the responsibility to impart it to the students.”

“We lost our confidence in our own civilization for over a century, when we came into contact with the western races with their material superiority over the Eastern Humanity and Eastern culture and in the educational establishments no provision was made for our own culture. And for over a century, our students have been brought up in utter ignorance of worth of their own civilization of the past. Thus we did not only lose the touch of the great which lay hidden in our own inheritance, but also the great honour of giving what we have; not merely begging from others, not merely borrowing culture and living like eternal school boys.

But the time has come when we must not waste such our opportunities. We must try to do our best to bring out what we have, not go from century to century, from land to land and display our poverty before others. We know what we have to be proud of, what we have inherited from our ancestors and such opportunity of giving should not be lost not only for sake of our country but for the sake of Humanity.”

People like Buddha, Tagore, Gandhi, Raja Ram Mohan Roy spoke of education which met the needs of all time. Their priorities were not restricted to the needs of the immediate generation. They have

remained not only relevant but even become more essential in the later years; spanning several inter-generational times. What made them different from other teachers is the value of their lessons in a timeless and context-neutral space. They were universities themselves who imparted an universal education. How do we measure the universality dimensions of education is a question that plagues my mind.

Universal Education: From Anecdotal Experience

I had the fortune of learning some universal lessons from a learned man prior to my age of ten. I registered those lessons and internalized them when I was young. To the extent possible, I have tried to practice them. I learnt through practice that these were lessons that have spanned several intergenerational times and at the end of every century, they have become even more valuable and relevant. I propose to share with you ten of them, without elaborating the anecdotes that gave the lessons from universal education. They are

- I. Define success as what you got and not what you seek.
- II. Every creation of God has a purpose. Find the purpose of your creation and pursue the purpose selflessly. Selflessness should be devoid of self-satisfaction as well.
- III. Punish none in life even under provocative circumstances.
- IV. Without your cooperation, no one can insult you. Never cooperate with those who try to insult you.
- V. Knowledge and ego are bad companions. Seek knowledge but shed ego.
- VI. Goodness is more valuable than greatness.
- VII. Ask not as to why you should not do things. Understand as to why you do what you should before doing what you do.
- VIII. Contentment is the essence of life. Expectation is the root of frustrations. Follow the path of aspiration and not the expectation.
- IX. Education should meet the needs of life and not living alone; and
- X. Focus on happiness of others from your actions rather than your own.

Concluding Remarks

Ladies and Gentlemen, convocation is a time of registration of information. This day is special. Graduands might not be in a state of mind to receive any new information. If such information would require an analytical mental frame, this day may not be the most suited. Hence the Guest Speaker is expected to write the texts down and share the thoughts backing their conversation. I have shared some of my thoughts and more precisely some questions. Mankind has learnt to measure what could be measured. How to measure the universality dimensions of education is a question.

I would like the educators and institutions to ponder over the importance of universality of education. I chose to raise these questions in Kolkata with a hope that at least one of you would find some value and find answers to some of the questions raised in this address.

I have shared some universal lessons I learnt from my education. They are probably directly from our epics. I would recommend to my fellow-learners to examine the universality value of some of these lessons and adapt them to suit their life and living circumstances.

Buddha advised us not to accept anything that has been given to us as such without questioning and internalise only those that appeal to our rationality. I hope that at least some of you at this convocation would be able to push the frontier of knowledge on "Universality Dimensions of Education".

Let me thank all of you for this opportunity and sharing one of the most important occasions of your lives. I am grateful and sincerely wish every one of you not only success but also boundless happiness throughout your lives.

Jai Hind!

Printed by : Sri Sanat Kumar Basu
Jadavpur University Press (Printing), Kolkata - 700032