

NOT TO BE LENT OUT

Convoocation Address

by

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1960



JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY

Mr. President, Mr. Rector, Fellows and Graduates, present and past, of this University, and Friends,

I was fortunate enough to have the privilege of attending the last two convocations of this University. And like all of you, I too listened with rapt attention to words of wisdom from two most distinguished sons of India. While I am genuinely grateful for the honour that you have conferred upon me today, I must confess that I am more than a little embarrassed at having been chosen to follow that great statesman and scholar who is President of India and the other men of great eminence—one an administrator, one an educationist and one a scientist. I am neither a scholar, nor a scientist, neither an administrator nor an educationist, and I have no words of wisdom to offer you today. I am merely a woman who is struggling without conspicuous success to perform a man's task for which I possess neither the temperament nor the necessary training. All that I can claim to have achieved in the four years I have spent here is some small measure of understanding of the myriad of delicate and difficult and interrelated problems confronting this beautiful and tragic State. I was forgetting, there is one more thing I have gained, and that is a deep and abiding love for the sensitive and warm-hearted people of Bengal, who have so generously extended to me a friendship, which I am poignantly conscious, I have done nothing to deserve.

In my far-away home in the Deccan, during my equally far-away childhood, I used to listen wide-eyed with wonder to my grand-father Aghore Nath Chattopadhyay, speaking with exuberant pride about the mighty leaders of thought,

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sages and scholars, poets and scientists, educationists and politicians that his generation had produced in Bengal. Though their names were familiar to me in my childhood, I had no prescience that ultimately one day my own life would move within the orbit of theirs. For, since I came to Bengal, hardly a day has passed when I have not found tangible proof of the still living influence of those great men on the hearts and lives of the people of Bengal. And how could I come closer to them than I am today, surrounded by all the bright-faced students whose minds have been moulded and enriched in this University, whose nucleus was the National Council of Education, founded fifty years ago, by the very same men of whom I used to hear in my childhood? Surely, it is not just a casual coincidence that the hundred years from the time of the Mutiny should have produced in Bengal such a galaxy of men of mighty intellect and dynamic personality, who not only dominated Bengal, but who shaped thought and action throughout India, and some of whom attained world-wide recognition. How close in age some of them were to each other! It is just about two and a half years ago that we celebrated the centenaries of Bipin Chandra Pal and Jagadish Chandra Bose. A few months ago it was the centenary of Ashutosh Chaudhuri to whom this University owes a special debt, because it was on his personal initiative that the National Council was founded. Throughout this year that has just dawned, everywhere in the world prayers of thanks-giving will be offered for the birth of Rabindranath Tagore who created a wealth of imperishable beauty for mankind. And early next year, we shall all bow in homage again for the centenary of Swami Vivekananda who re-interpreted for us and for the world the ancient wisdom of India.

To all these wise men of vision who laboured to evolve

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a national design of education in the difficult circumstances in which they lived, we owe a debt of gratitude that we can never hope to repay, except by steadfast and united endeavour to keep untarnished the high ideals on which they founded their work. All of them were highly gifted men, and if they had so chosen, they could have developed their own individual talents for their own personal glorification. But fortunately for Bengal, they were all men imbued with a burning patriotism. And they realised in time that if they did not do something to preserve for generations still unborn, the inheritance that was their rightful share, there was great danger to the generations that would follow. Their questing eyes, looking far into the future, saw the inevitable consequences that would ensue from a system of education that was alien to the peculiar genius of our race.

I have talked of the inheritance of the past. I do not think that the bright pageant of India's history that contains the long succession of kings and emperors, and the wars that they waged, and the empires they built, has very much importance. What is important, what is for us a priceless treasure to cherish, is the saga of the growth of India's inner life, of her achievement in different spheres of culture, of her adventure in the realms of the spirit, and above all, of those superb concepts of thought and action that she formulated for all time to come.

More than half a century ago, during the grimmest period of India's subjection to alien domination, the founders of this institution had the intuitive understanding to see—what we do not today in a free India, because we allow ourselves to be driven hither and thither by the ruthless compulsion of passing and often very trivial events—the danger that there is. We today stand in imminent

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terror of forgetting that whatever powerful learning we may adopt, if it is to have any enduring value, it must be deep-rooted in those ethical standards of thought and action which, in the ultimate analysis, alone determine the quality of integrity of individuals as of nations.

We have to remember that we cannot allow ourselves to be lured away by the easy rewards, the swift rewards, of what I might call, not with any desire to belittle it, utilitarian knowledge. We have to guard against raising any edifice of learning without that essential basis to which I have referred. In the entire history of mankind never has there been more bitter a need for this foundation to be strengthened, to be built with care and with grace. For we live today in a changing and unstable world where all ethical standards are wavering, all values are shaking and all national and international codes of morality are vacillating.

Since the advent of independence there has been ceaseless activity among the educationists in India. Day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year, I read of long academic discussions in which expert dialectics are concentrated on the question of education in India. Our educational experts have been pondering over and analysing the defects in our present educational system, on the radical changes that are necessary, on the need for new approach to certain specific problems, on the exact degree of synthesis that is desirable between the teaching of the humanities and the teaching of sciences. They are busy with other burning subjects. And all these matters are of vital importance to the future of education in India. And it is proper that those who are competent to do so, should amend our system in accordance with the changing needs of our people. But I

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do not think I can over emphasise the fact that no matter what technical changes may be made in our educational system from time to time, a very heavy burden of responsibility rests with the universities and all those who guide their destiny. A university, if it is not to defeat its own purpose, must stand for humanism and tolerance, for reason and progress, for the venture of new ideas, and the ever old and ever young search for truth. Every university, if it is to justify its existence must symbolise within itself, the onward march of the human race to higher and higher objectives. But it can only do this if it keeps itself unsullied by refusing to harbour any bigotry of thought, any pettiness of purpose. And so, this University, which has, in these few years of its existence, so subtly solved many of the problems to which I have referred, has made its own synthesis, it has settled for itself all the other questions that are vexing the educationists, and its results have been so happy and so promising for all other institutions that have started recently.

To all the young graduates who are now on the threshold of their new careers, I offer my greetings and my benediction. It has given me great happiness to hear from the Rector that most of you will be spared the bitter frustration that is, alas, the tragic fate of so many hundreds of graduates in Bengal who are unable to find employment. For those of you, of course, who have the qualifications of engineers and technologists, as Dr. Roy has just explained, there is ample scope in the various schemes for the regeneration of India's economy which is, after all, the underlying purpose of our different plans. I support him in pleading with you: Do not remain content merely with gaining a secure and fruitful employment. Because, if you are to be true to the traditions of this University, you have to give to India far

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more than just your technical knowledge. India has gained her political freedom—but what meaning does it have unless we can transmute that freedom into economic and social security for our people? All of us in different ways have to serve India through her millions. And all of us have to contribute in some way towards the cooperative efforts to eradicate poverty and ignorance and disease and inequalities of opportunity. It was the heart's desire of him who secured freedom for us, to wipe away every tear in every eye. And while it is not possible for us lesser mortals to fulfil the desire of Mahatma Gandhi, so long as there is suffering, so long as there are tears, none of us dare to stand aloof with folded hands. If we are to fulfil our dream of a united and yet composite India, we have to be indomitable in our fight against every form of bigotry, against untouchability, against communalism, against linguism—every thing that threatens to destroy the unity of India. If a single one of you, no matter in how remote a fashion, and how indirectly, condone any form of bigotry that leads to internal strife and violence, it will be an act of base treachery towards those great ones who laboured to give you the opportunities you enjoy today. It will be more than that. It will be a violation, in spirit, if not in letter, of the pledges that are embodied in our Constitution. The Constitution of India guarantees equal rights to every human being in this great continent, equal rights and equal opportunities of service and growth. For it is only so that we can become a strong and free nation and a truly democratic one. If, as you go on your way—I do not know how far destiny will take some of you—you will always remember what Mahatma Gandhi said, you will be safe. He always taught us, that ideals and objectives can never be divorced from the methods used for their realisation. India is very young as a nation; but she is very ancient as a civilisation. And every time one of us violates what Mahatma Gandhi has

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said, every time one of us believes that unworthy means can result in worthy ends, by so much does he damage the sanctity of the civilisation of India.

I wish all of you happiness and prosperity in your new lives.

The first part of the book is devoted to a general survey of the history of the subject, and to a discussion of the various theories which have been advanced to explain the origin of the human mind.

The second part of the book is devoted to a detailed examination of the various theories which have been advanced to explain the origin of the human mind.

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