

TWENTYEIGHTH CONVOCATION ADDRESS

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**PROFESSOR G. RAM REDDY
CHAIRMAN
UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION
NEW DELHI.**

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I deem it a great honour to address the convocation of the Indian Statistical Institute which was founded by Dr.P.C.Mahalanobis who was one of our distinguished thinkers. I am beholden to Shri P.N. Haksar for conferring this honor upon me which I cherish as a rare privilege.

This Institute was the first to lay foundation for statistical base in this country. Since its establishment, the institute has trained a large number of scientists and social scientists who occupy pivotal position in various walks of life. With a modest beginning in a portion of the Physics Department of Presidency College, the Institute has blossomed into one of India's premier academic institutions - an institute about which the country can be really proud of.

Today, I wish to speak on development and education in particular, development and higher education. I do this because, of late, there has been a controversy regarding the role and relevance of higher education in the development of a country.

The nexus between development and education was not clearly demonstrated in the past centuries since education was accessible only to the elites. It is generally believed, and I agree with this, that welfare measures introduced by public organisations, in particular government, can have effect only when the people are educated. No developmental measure

inputed into the society by the State or any other agency will have its desirable impact unless the people are beyond a threshold of readiness to participate in the process of development, and education is perhaps the only force to take them beyond this threshold.

The Education Commission (1964-66) observed that "in a world based on science and technology, it is education that determines the level of prosperity, welfare and security of the people¹". The Commission emphasised that the development of human resources through education is the panacea for the problems of national development such as self-sufficiency in food, economic growth and full employment, social and national integration and political development. It is further observed that development of physical resources is a means to an end and that of human resources is an end in itself. Moreover, education is an empowering phenomenon which equips the people to combat social injustice and exploitation, and which provides the necessary synergy for a structural socio-political transformation².

Having put forth this general argument, let me now look closely at **development**, and how **education** is critically associated with it. What exactly do these terms connote and how are they linked with each other?

Fletcher defined development as the actualisation of an implicit potentiality; the simplest example being the pattern of growth and maturation of a seed or an initial germ cell to the full adult form of the individual plant or animal or human process³. However, development, when seen in the context of a society or a nation, connotes different things in different perspectives. At times it connotes economic growth; at times it means modernisation of institutions, values and behaviour; it can also denote greater equity and social justice⁴. While **growth** is usually economic in its connotation, **development** has social,

political and cultural dimensions. While generation of wealth is what **growth** generally indicates, how this wealth gets distributed and how it is deployed for the general well-being of the people is what **development** is all about. The phrase "well-being of people" is, however, hard to define; it has moral and political implications. As Berger puts it, "the notion of development is at least implicitly one of moral approval and political purpose. Put simply, development means good growth and desirable modernisation"⁵. But then, what is good and desirable has a great deal of ideological undercurrents.

In the present context, development refers to : (a) industrialisation, (b) political and economic independence, (c) modernisation, (d) economic growth in terms of indicators such as productivity, national income, etc., (e) equity and social justice, and (f) movement from rural to urban. We cannot take a narrow view of development⁶. It is holistic - it is individual, social, political, economic, cultural, moral, rural, urban, local, national, regional and even international. It is therefore, difficult to limit it to a few aspects.

Education is engaged in a complex dialectical interaction with social development. By its very nature, education is a force of social reproduction. But at the same time, it acts as a microcosm of the larger society, and it prepares the minds of those who would eventually influence the destiny of the larger society. As stated in the UNESCO report, "Education reproduces and even exacerbates and perpetuates the vices inherent in the society..... However in apparent contradiction to this educational world may well set the stage, with an interior revolution of its own, for a subsequent social revolution."⁷ "If we take an overall look at the evolution of educational activity through time, we soon see that progress in education accompanies economic progress, and consequently evolution in production technique, although it is not always easy to discern

the respective causes among the complex interacting elements"⁸. Talking of the current phenomena of education, the report says that probably for the first time in the history of humanity, development of education on a worldwide scale is tending to precede economic development⁹. This trend has emerged boldly and successfully in countries like Japan and the United States. The developing countries are following a similar path¹⁰

It is believed that education promotes development by promoting (i) increased production, (ii) modernising society, (iii) social and national integration, (iv) development of democratic values, (v) secularism, and (vi) synthesis between scientific and cultural values¹¹. No wonder it is argued that there is little progress without education and there is little education with poverty. If we look at the picture in the developed world we find that there is high literacy rate and higher standards of living.

Schultz argues that investment in education is justified because the educated population contributes to socio-economic development of the society and also contributes to the well being of the individual.¹² Harbison and Myers, observe that the wealth of the country is based on its power to develop and effectively utilise the innate capacity of its people.¹³ Their study in 75 countries reveals that there is positive correlation between education and economic development¹⁴. It is well known that education provides the learners the wide range of opportunities: better jobs, higher pay, higher standard of living and social mobility. It also promotes personal benefits to the learners as well as to the society. The success of literacy campaigns suggests that some parts of the less developed world are attaining in 20 years, what the industrial world took over 100 years¹⁵. The educated population is skilled and

productive. Thus, education is an agent of change and in turn changed by society.

TABLE-I

Adult Literacy Rate of Countries having different levels of development

	1960	1975	1985
Low Income Countries	29	38	32
Middle Income Countries	54	71	72
Industrialised Countries	-	99	98

Source: World Bank Education, World Development Report 1986.

The data reveals that the percentage of adult literacy was 98 in industrialised countries, whereas in the middle income countries it was 72 and in the low income countries it was 32. Bowman and Anderson argue that literacy rate of about 40% is necessary for a sustained level of economic growth, and rapid expansion cannot occur until 70-80% of population is literate¹⁶. With a literacy figure of 52.11%, India has a long way to cover. Moreover, the annual rate of growth in population being 2.11%, by the turn of the century the largest number of illiterates will be in India. It has its serious implications for the country's development.

Ours is an age of science and technology and vast changes are taking place in these two areas. They create demand for skilled man-power. In fact, the existing educated man-power needs to be retrained in some areas. In such a world we cannot afford to shun or avoid adoption of technology, as technology simplifies work task. As Burton Clark writes:

One modern condition of great moment is the harnessing of society to a technology, already huge, that expands at an accelerating pace. Modern man is clearly in a second scientific revolution. The first revolution centred on the steam engine and the spinning machine, and put machines in place of muscle. The second scientific revolution (occurring in the last 40 years and especially since 1945) centres on atomic energy, automation, computers and chemical materials. It greatly magnifies technically produced energy, changes processing methods, alters the materials on which men and machines work, and often substitutes machines for human thought and control. Although we have been sliding into a technological age on the basis of accumulated techniques produced by the first scientific revolution, we are now in for technology with a vengeance. Through its ramifying effects - for example, on transportation, communications and the distribution of goods - technology alters nearly all institutions.¹⁷

Not the least of the alteration, Clark argument, is seen in technology's effect on the role of education. Our age demands army upon army of skilled technicians and professional experts, and to the task of preparing these men, educational system is increasingly dedicated¹⁸

It is in this context, I would like to invite your attention to the changes that are taking place and their implications. All over the world, we are witnessing dramatic economic, political and social changes. The mighty Soviet Empire has disintegrated. The socialist countries of Eastern Europe have changed their approach to their economic and political systems. Our next door neighbour - China, while talking socialism in politics, has changed her economic policies. The disappearance of cold war has altered the political relations between countries.

In our own country, the situation is changing. There is now more emphasis on market economy than on planning. In a sense India has never followed any rigid policy of either socialism or capitalism. While emphasising the issue of equity and social justice, Nehru always talked of mixed economy in which the public sector will play an important role in certain core areas and in certain other areas the private sector has to have a prominent role. It would be refreshing today to read the writings and speeches of Jawaharlal Nehru in this context. Irrespective of the rhetoric, this has been the policy in the country.

Now further changes are being introduced to strengthen market economy and de-regulate some of the existing areas. Liberalisation pre-supposes competition not only within the country but also at a trans-national level. Under this system only those who are productive, efficient and maintain high quality will have a chance to survive. It is in this context, the role of higher education needs to be considered.

During the last few years, there has been a controversy regarding higher education in general and the role of the State in it. It is argued by some that we have had vast expansion in higher education. Therefore, it does not need to be further expanded. Instead of the State spending money on higher education it should concentrate more on basic, primary and vocational

education. No right thinking person would dispute that priority should be given to these sectors. This, however, does not mean that it should conflict with the priority attached to higher education. Attaching higher priority to basic education does not imply reappropriating funds from higher education to these sectors. On the other hand, it means finding ways and means to mobilise resources hitherto left untapped and deploying these resources proportionately to all sectors of education. All sectors and levels of education are organically interlinked. Higher education, especially, is crucially placed in generating expertise in the planning and functioning of these other sectors.

Moreover, it should be remembered that liberalisation results in more demand for trained manpower and if such trained manpower is not available, liberalisation and economic development would suffer. Higher education, like other levels of education, promotes development by (a) providing skilled manpower, (b) helping to spread science and technology, and (c) generating new knowledge through research. Higher education is critically linked with national development in terms of its role in ensuring self-reliance in scientific and technological know-how, in generating skills crucially placed in sectors of development, in producing leadership in every department of societal functioning and in generating social criticism so vital in the life of a democracy.

The three major traditional functions of the university are: (a) the development of individual, (b) preservation and advancement of culture, and (c) maintenance and further development of technology. In order to become a person an individual needs to grow up in a culture, and richer the culture the more of a person he has a chance of becoming. The central purpose of institutions of higher education is to educate (adults as well as young people); and the aim of education is to develop each

individual as fully as possible to make man more human¹⁹. The full development of the individual as a person is not only the major aim of institutions of higher learning, but a fundamental aim of the political and social order itself. A good society will come, writes Sanford "when its members are capable of the highest satisfaction of the mind and spirit"²⁰

In addition to this, the present day education system has to prepare man for the 21st century. No one is in a position to foresee the demands of the 21st century. The fact is that for the first time in history, education is now engaged in preparing people for a type of society which does not at the moment exist. At a time when the aim of education should be to train, "unknown children for an unknown world" the force of circumstances demands that educationists do some hard thinking, and that in so doing they shape the future²¹. Therefore, the task of all the educational systems is not only to prepare the professional expert but also prepare him in such a manner that he would be able to face the unforeseen challenges of the decades to come. The expertise should not be such that the person would lose sight of the general context. In addition to being an expert or specialised type of man he also needs to be a cultivated man.

The issue before us is what man ought to become, what institutions ought to do in support of man's becoming all that he can. Moral principles that used to be taken for granted in the universities now have to be spelled out and their implications made clear²²

These are some of the challenges which education, in particular higher education, has to face. Higher education is particularly vulnerable because it has been vested with too many hopes, saddled with too many responsibilities and held accountable for too many solutions²³. When we are dealing with the requirements of future world, there are risks.

There will undoubtedly be distortions in today's view of tomorrow. The present provides prejudiced glimpses of the future²⁴. We need to identify the features of tomorrow's educational house. We find ourselves "in a hall of mirrors with distorted reflections all about us. We should be ready to reject, at least in parts each and everyone of them"²⁵.

But one thing is a certainty - that is the crucial role of higher education. As Kerr observes "there is, a certainty that higher education will be more needed in the future than in the past as a supplier of ever more advanced skills, as a source of ever more complex new ideas, as an entry to an ever more desired and higher equality of life for individuals, as a supplier of ever more needed social commentary as a basis for social reform, and as a preserver and enhancer of ever expanding cultural heritage"²⁶.

Indian higher educational institutions will be tested on these anvils. The next couple of decades are going to be extremely crucial for India in asserting its political and economic relevance in a world which will become increasingly competitive economically and which is emerging to be politically unipolar. The idealism of the Fifties has given way to geo-political pragmatism. And in this scenario, India as a nation and society is going to look up to higher education for a lot of things. Indian higher education is going to be tested for its resilience and vitality. The institutions of higher education, and the academic community will have to live up to this challenge. Else, they will be rendered vestiges mutely and helplessly witnessing changes around, which they are not able to comprehend or catch up with.

Before I conclude, I would like to wish the outgoing graduates all the best in their lives, and I am sure the training received in this institute will stand them in good stead. In their later lives, when they look back, they would find the days spent here as the most memorable ones. It was Robertson Davies who, talking of university life, has said: "**Autumn to me is the most congenial of seasons; the university, to me is the most congenial of lives**".

Thank you,

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