

**Vardhaman Mahaveer University
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**Reinventing the Universities:
Higher Education in a Global Society**

**Convocation Lecture
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Reinventing the Universities: Higher Education in a Global Society

His Excellency Sri S. K. Singh, the Chancellor of the University and the Honorable Governor of Rajasthan; Professor. V. N. Rajasekharan Pillai, the Vice-Chancellor of Indira Gandhi National Open University and the honorable guest of honor; Professor Naresh Dadhich, the most distinguished Vice Chancellor of Vardhaman Mahaveer University, the learned members of the Faculty, distinguished guests, and my fellow students.

It is indeed a pleasure to be here with you today; and I am very grateful for being afforded the privilege of delivering the convocation lecture for 2009. I stand before you with some trepidation. I feel honored and humbled, in equal measure. I am aware only too acutely that I have no particular qualifications for this task; and I lack the distinction and erudition of the many eminent people who are gathered here this evening to hear me. Notwithstanding my inadequacies, I am deeply grateful to both the Chancellor and the Vice Chancellor of the University for conferring this great honor on me.

It is a day of joy and celebration for all of us gathered here. We are here to celebrate the success of those who are graduating; and that is what I propose to do today. But before I do that I want to salute, honor and thank all those who have made this day possible and are working to make this world a better place.

We have in our midst today one of the truly most remarkable public servants of our times. His Excellency Sri S. K. Singh has rolled many lives into one. He is a public servant, a diplomat par excellence; an academician and one of the foremost thinkers in India. He is erudite and learned but carries his scholarship lightly. He is a linguist of rare distinction who speaks many languages including Persian, Sanskrit and Urdu. He has held all the high offices that any Indian can aspire to – he represented his country as an ambassador to several countries ,was the foreign secretary, has served (and is serving) as governor in two states and has founded the Center for Advanced Studies in New Delhi. He has not only held important and high offices but he epitomizes the best values of this great country: he is a liberal democrat, secular, tolerant and an upholder of the

rule of law and fairness. But success and high positions have not taken away his natural humility. To his friends, S.K. remains self-effacing, courteous, witty, gregarious and generous to a fault. He is unflinchingly loyal to his many friends and family but has always placed service and duty to his country and people first. And behind his public persona he is a quiet family man, a devoted husband and a doting father.

India has been truly lucky to be served by some of the most dedicated public servants. It is they who through their dedicated, selfless and committed hard work have contributed to the making of this great country. Amongst them stand your Governor and Chancellor. We are all blessed to have this dedicated and visionary person as the Chancellor of the University. Ladies and gentlemen please join me in celebrating this noble soul and his lady wife, Manju.

I am extremely touched and immensely grateful that my esteemed friend, Professor. V. N. Rajasekharan Pillai has honored me and all of us here by consenting to be the guest of honor at the convocation ceremony. Professor Pillai is exceptionally well known in the academic community. In a career spanning almost four decades he has not only taught in national and international universities but he has also held every coveted position in the academia. Before becoming the vice chancellor of the prestigious Indira Gandhi National Open University he had the distinction of heading two other universities, he was the director of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council, the chairman of the University Grants Commission and the founder director of the School of Professional Distance Education. But high offices and administrative preoccupation did not prevent him from pursuing his academic interests. He is regarded as one of the foremost chemists in India; he is a Fellow of the Indian Academy of Sciences; an Honorary Senior Fellow of the Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research in Bangalore is His presence has elevated all of us here today. I am very grateful to him.

I next turn to the captain of the ship, the Vice Chancellor of the University Professor Naresh Dadhich. Our paths had not crossed before but when he asked me to come and deliver the convocation lecture, I did some research and discovered truly a most remarkable man and scholar. The gentle vice chancellor is one of the leading scholars of Gandhi in the world today and one of the finest moral philosophers. An erudite scholar, who has not only written and

published extensively on Gandhian philosophy but also lived and worked by the principles of the great Mahatma. Under his leadership Vardhaman Mahaveer University has established itself as a major center of learning in India. He is a remarkable institution builder who leads through example and has successfully brought out the best in his faculty and students. We are fortunate to have a person of his erudition, vision and selfless dedication at the helm of this university. I thank you Mr. Vice Chancellor and wish you all the success as you go forward.

Let me now turn to the faculty and the academic community of Vardhaman Mahaveer University. The universities are as good as the faculty and the women and men who help to run this university. Teaching is the noblest of all professions. Teachers help to ensure that each generation hands our civilization to the next generation, better and more enriched than the one they had inherited. Teachers are the unsung heroes and heroines of society; they have quietly and selflessly walked the extra mile so that the best in you is brought out during the years of study; they have dedicated their lives to your advancement and well being; and they live vicariously through your success and glory. And hidden from behind the scenes are the administrators, the managers, the caterers and the gardeners and all those who make it possible for this university to function smoothly and make your academic journey pleasant and comfortable. I salute them and offer our grateful thanks.

I next turn to the parents, the grandparents, aunts and uncles; and sisters and brothers, and the many spouses, who not only had the good sense to encourage you to pursue a University education but have also made many sacrifices so that you could have these care-free years and to ensure that your future is secure. These years that you spent in the University will always stand out as the most formative experience of your life. It has helped you improve your mind, to develop your interests and passions, and above all to find your own identity and to become the person you want to be. This is the most selfless gift that you are ever going to receive; and they have done all this not because they expect anything in return. You have already rewarded them with your hard work and good results; and you will bring them untold joy through your happiness and success. To the parents and families I bow my head in gratitude not only for what you have done for your daughters, sons and wards, but also for endowing society with another generation of bright, dedicated and eager members of the community. We shall forever be in

your debt.

Finally, let me turn to you, all those of you who are graduating today. It is your day and we are gathered here to celebrate you. You have worked hard, you have struggled for years to get here, and by your performance you have honored your teachers and thanked your parents and benefactors. It is your day; make the most of it. You deserve every bit of happiness and adulation that is heaped on you.

And as you celebrate your success you might also reflect on your good luck. The sheer fact that you are here graduating from this great University indicates that you have won the lottery of life and that you have already become a member of a most select group of global elite. Only a tiny number – fewer than two percent of people around the world — get this far. Along with celebration it is also a moment for reflection. I will return to you at the end of the lecture.

Let me now make a very personal statement from the bottom of my heart. Ladies and Gentlemen, to be honored by this distinguished Indian University has a very deep personal and emotional significance for me. I love India and the people of this country with all my heart. India is my ancestral home. It is where my mother and father were born and where my ancestors are buried. I have spent some of the best years of my life here; my closest friends and associates, including a generation of my students, are spread through the length and breadth of India. India has shaped my values, my ideals and my outlook. India gave me my love for liberal democracy, it quickened my passion for social justice; and it was here that I learnt the significance of diversity, tolerance, multiculturalism and secularism.

No less importantly India gave me my heroes and my role models in Lord Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi. Rabindranath Tagore gave me my sense of identity, the pride in my language, my love for all things beautiful and the pursuit of the divine through music. Kabir inspired me about the oneness of humanity and instilled in me the love for fellow human beings irrespective of the caste, creed or color. Jawaharlal Nehru, who is my all time hero, taught me that the path to the Creator is through the service of mankind. Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose showed us that no sacrifice is too big in the cause of one's homeland; and just as, in our own times, from Mother

Theresa and Srimati Sonia Gandhi I have learnt that love for India transcends the place of our birth. The honor that you have conferred on me today has stirred my deepest emotions. I thank you all.

Let me now turn to the subject of my talk: how universities must reinvent themselves to meet the challenges of a global society. And although I am extremely ill equipped to deliver this lecture, I am nonetheless delighted to share with you my reflections on the challenges of higher education in a global society in the twenty first century. In the lecture today I will argue that universities must reinvent themselves as they face with the challenges of the new knowledge-based global society; and that universities must not only rethink their role and purpose but they must also become innovative and strive for excellence to become globally competitive. Today knowledge and scholarship is benchmarked by global standards. To be competitive, universities, like the market, must attract the best faculty and students; and they must provide world class facilities, libraries and laboratories. Our students will be competing for jobs against global competition and will be pitted against the best around the world. Quality, innovation and excellence will be the hallmark of successful universities. The success of universities will depend the success of our society. I will argue today that in a world where talent is scarce, universities have a responsibility to harness the best brains and help to develop human capability. We have an additional challenge. We must not only build world class universities but also make higher education accessible to all the academically brilliant students irrespective of their social and economic backgrounds. In a knowledge economy, every woman and man is an important resource and we as a society cannot let that precious resource go to waste. It is not just a case of equity and social justice – and both of these are important – but a matter of survival and national security to harness human capabilities. In conclusion I will suggest that the universities have an important role in developing human potential and will be a powerful engine for development in the twenty first century.

1. Preparing Students as Global Citizens

In an interdependent global society the distinction between home and abroad has largely vanished. We live not only in a global economy and society, but it is also very complex,

interconnected and interdependent world. It is no longer possible to differentiate between national and international, home and abroad, or local and global. Our challenges therefore are to prepare and equip our students as global citizens. As global citizens our students will have to traverse many worlds and operate at many different levels. They must at the same time be at home both here and abroad. They should be able to transcend from one society to another effortlessly, be capable of communicating in multiple languages and be able to work in institutions and organizations that are international, diverse, and multicultural. No less importantly they will be able to understand diverse perspectives born out of differing cultural and geographic experience. And as global citizens, imbued with the Gandhian belief that they serve a cause that is larger than the self, they will think global and act local. In short the Universities must train you to become a global citizen equipped to cope with the complexities of a global community.

Information technology, radio and television have shrunk the world. All countries, big and small, must cope with the realities of a global economy and society. No country is an island in itself. India is a part of the global community and it cannot shirk away from problems in far away regions even if our own direct interest may or may not be directly at stake. In the world of business and trade it is no longer possible to distinguish the origins or nationality of a product that we use every day – the cloth for the shirt manufactured in India is probably imported from Singapore, the cotton for the yarn comes from Egypt, the buttons from Thailand, and it is actually sold and worn by consumers around the world under the brand name of Harrods in London's Knightsbridge or Saks in New York's Fifth Avenue. Home and abroad are no longer separate categories.

The recent global economic crisis that started with the subprime mortgages in the United States has hit India just as it is hurting other parts of the world. Needless to say India is interconnected to the rest of the world through myriad relationships; so are our students graduating today. As a global citizen you will compete not only with those in India but also with the best and the brightest around the world. There will be no room for mediocrity in a knowledge based economy. In a world which is fast becoming without borders and frontiers, where the distinction between domestic and international is becoming virtually obsolete, you will have to

prepare yourself to be a citizen of the world and take on global responsibilities.

2. Reinventing the University in the New Global Society

Faced with the challenges of globalization, most institutions and organizations – markets, corporations, governments, the media and the manufacturer – have had to reinvent themselves. The universities are no exception, and like other institutions, they too must reinvent themselves. They must adapt the curriculum to train students to be global citizens who will need to be much more acculturated with the larger environment in which they will live and work. It will mean building on the strong foundations and traditions of the university to make it truly international while firmly preserving its distinctive liberal arts traditions.

Globalization poses a challenge not only for you as students but also for the teachers of the university. Globalization has major ramifications for what we teach our students, what experiences we offer them while they are at the universities, and how we build knowledge that will enable us to better understand the global world. The challenge for the universities, therefore, is not only to continue to train and discipline the minds of the students through the traditional liberal arts education and to provide them with the tools of life-long learning, but also to broaden their education through academic exposure and first hand living and working experiences in diverse and multicultural settings.

Global education lies at the core of that experience. Global education and international exposure is no longer an add-on that interested students may opt for or not. International experience through immersion programs and study abroad are important but not in themselves sufficient. Rather global education must be an integral part of the core experience – academic and extra-curricular – that the Universities offer to every student.

This will involve rethinking the kind of global experience that universities must provide the student in the classroom and outside; the curriculum that we teach has to be redesigned to integrate global perspective into everything that we teach –whether it is physics or politics; we have built global knowledge that draws from the ideas and experiences from diverse perspective and disciplines; and most important of all, we have to ensure that our universities are truly

inclusive where quality education is accessible to all meritorious students irrespective of their economic or social status. To reiterate our challenge, therefore, is not only to continue to train the minds of the students through the traditional liberal arts education and provide them with the tools of lifelong learning, but also to broaden their experiences through academic exposure and first hand living and working experience of international settings in diverse and multicultural settings.

The global experience is not a discrete or a separate part of the education of the students. Rather it must be interjected into the everyday life of the students by bringing to the campus a diverse and international community of students and faculty. This will involve creating a learning environment in which the students can experience and understand the outside world while still in the university; it will entail creating opportunities, facilities and programs to give the students a firsthand experience of the world outside of our borders. To prepare students as global citizens we have to train them to understand that groups of people presented with the same set of evidence often reach different conclusions. A diverse campus offers students the opportunity to test their own assumptions with fellow students and scholars of different nationalities, religions, languages and socio-economic backgrounds. It is the failure to understand and respect each others' perspectives and assumptions that often contributes to global misunderstandings, tensions and conflicts.

Classrooms are indeed the traditional arenas for imparting education but it is well known that students learn as much in the classroom as they do outside. We have to capture every 'teachable moment' by creating a total learning environment so that students imbibe as much from their surroundings - their friends, clubs, society and in the dining halls – as they do from their professors, classes, lectures, seminars, laboratories and tutorials. It is therefore vital that what is offered in the formal academic curriculum is supplemented by opportunities and experiences on the campus that will expose the students to the world outside. In other words, we have to replicate a microcosm of the world outside within our own universities. We must let the world into our ivory towers.

To make the university truly diverse, we have to recreate a microcosm of the world at large and

we must make our universities the destination of choice for students, visiting faculty and scholars, practitioners, distinguished lecturers, writers, filmmakers and so forth. The universities should take advantage of the enormous human resources in neighboring areas to tap into the rich pool of international expertise from the diplomatic community, the international organizations, the government, the corporations, the supreme court, the rich array of civil society and development agencies, the think-tanks, the newspapers and, of course, the parliament. In addition to hosting distinguished visitors, the universities should also provide global exposure through international film, music, literary and cultural festivals and international cuisine.

Integration of the global perspective in the curriculum is necessary but not enough for producing global citizen. The learning must go beyond the confines the campus; the students must have the opportunity of experiencing the world first hand through studying, working and living abroad. Most American and European universities are trying to enrich the experiences of the students by bringing foreign students into their campuses. Some universities have set a target of recruiting up to 10 percent of foreign students; other universities are setting up campuses abroad to give their students international exposure; other universities are forging partnerships with distant universities so that their students can study and experience other societies and ways of learning. The Indian universities are an important destination for such students. The Indian universities should open their doors to the foreign students – it is good for the visitors but it is also good for the Indian students – and should endeavor to create faculty and student exchange programs with foreign institutions. There is a huge international mobility of students beginning and it is important that Indian universities should tap into it pro-actively and create opportunities for their own students.

3. Redesigning the Curriculum:

Let me now turn to the question of curriculum. International exposure and experience certainly matters, but ultimately it is the academic content of the courses that are taught, that remains at the heart of University's mission. We have to rethink what we teach the students and revisit both the curriculum and the pedagogic approaches through which we impart instructions. One of the great challenges for the universities in the twenty first century will be to devise a curriculum that will be innovative, imaginative, and that will reflect the changed circumstances of our global

society.

The academic work that our students do in universities and colleges must provide them with the analytical and empirical tools necessary to comprehend the global society. This means that the universities have to integrate, to the greatest extent possible, a global perspective in as many of the courses in the curriculum as is feasible. It is no longer sufficient to create or add a number of courses that are labeled as 'international' or 'foreign'. That will be more of the same and will not be adequate in a global world where the demarcation between local and international, national and global and home and abroad has ceased to be a useful analytical or conceptual category. The creation of 'majors' and 'minors' in Global Studies may be an intermediate step to fully globalizing the course contents. Anything to advance a student's global knowledge is a step forward in making global citizens; and also enhances the chances of employability. In many universities even engineers, doctors, architects and teachers are opting to take global options both to gain exposure and also to enhance their employability. The more innovative universities now offer the students a choice, irrespective of their majors or specializations, an opportunity to earn a certificate in global studies.

The faculty and the students, by and large, understand the importance of creating new courses and curriculum material that genuinely integrates the international perspective in everything that is taught. But this is more easily said than done. First, this is a labor intensive process and will require each faculty member to review, revise and redo their courses, and very often this will require rewriting of their lectures and teaching material, and producing new case studies. Second, in some cases, it may require the faculty to undertake fresh studies and retool their own research. Changes of such magnitude can only be done gradually and over a period of time. Most of the changes will happen when faculty vacancies occur or new faculty positions are created. The provosts, deans, and departmental chairs will have to be strategic and opportunistic. The appointment of ever new faculty affords an opportunity to rethink the direction in which the provost and deans want to take their university. No position should be filled automatically and mechanically but should be viewed as a strategic opportunity to achieve the desired objective. They must also consider other innovative and novel mechanisms for augmenting the faculty expertise. The universities should also consider tapping expertise in the government and the

private sector through appointments of professors of practice. Distinguished statesmen, diplomats, chief executive officers, judges and public servants should be tapped by the universities to give the students insights into the world of practice.

In addition to affecting these changes through the recruitment of new faculties or replacement of the old, the universities will need to think of providing the faculty sabbatical and leave of absence from their teaching to develop their curriculum material and courses; in the interim universities will need to use visiting scholars and adjunct faculty with international expertise to fill the gap. This will be a long process, but it is the most effective way to create a curriculum with a genuinely global perspective.

An important of becoming global citizens is to be able to converse and conduct business in multiple languages. Most Indian students are lucky, say compared to the Americans or the Chinese, in that they grow up with several languages including English. Indeed proficiency in English has given Indian students a huge advantage in a global society where English has emerged as the language of the business. However, that is not enough. Our students have to compete with European and Asian students who emerge from universities with several major languages; and not surprisingly they are the most sought after employees. Our universities cannot afford to be left behind. It should be a condition of graduation that every student should demonstrate a fluency in one or more non-Indian foreign language. The best universities are cognizant of this and have set up Language Centers using technology to teach foreign languages. The universities in India must make foreign language teaching a priority as part of their globalizing efforts.

Addressing the challenges of today's world will require a move away from old style pedagogy. The pedagogic choices in the new curriculum must invariably be student-centered in which various teaching instruments – lectures, tutorials, seminars, case studies, simulation, role playing, student-led discussions and problem solving, student projects, films and videos, peer group learning – will have to be experimented with and adapted to make learning interesting, participatory, reflective and creative.

4. Knowledge Building from a Global Perspective

In most universities today, the students are forced to reside in the silos of their own discipline, unaware and unconcerned with other disciplines and approaches. Even in the best traditions of broad-based liberal arts programs, the emphasis on majors and concentrations tend to narrow the exposure of the students and marginalize other relevant bodies of knowledge.

In the last fifty years universities have experimented with inter-disciplinary, cross-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary approaches to training undergraduates but with limited success. In the challenging environment of the new millennium, we have to move beyond disciplines to a ‘post-disciplinary’ era by equipping students with a body of knowledge that will enable them to deal with the big issues and questions of our times from the perspectives of different disciplines and diverse methodologies. It will require versatility and knowledge drawn from diverse disciplines to study and understand the big challenges confronting us. Take, for example, the question of the environment. It is one of the big challenges of our time but it is certainly not capable of being understood or addressed by environmental science alone. Environmental challenges call for the understanding of not only the earth and environmental sciences but also of history, human rights, governance, resource management, sustainable economics and development studies just to name a few. In other words, the undergraduate students, instead of specializing in a particular discipline, will focus on a large problem facing the society and seek to study and understand a problem simultaneously from diverse perspectives and academic disciplines. The university will need to ensure that the courses and concentrations are designed around problems and issues rather than disciplines. Questions like environmental degradation or global warming, making democracy work in plural societies, or poverty or social justice are not confined to any one country nor are they problems only for developing societies. Students will have to learn and understand these large issues of the twenty first century in a comparative framework and see if some of the solutions found elsewhere have any resonance with their own experience and problems at home.

Globalization has also profoundly impacted the way in which we conduct research and build knowledge. Most of the major challenges of the twenty first century – population explosion,

genocide and forced large scale migration, the scarcity of food, water and energy, deforestation, environmental degradation and global warming, cross-border and global terrorism, public health issues like epidemics like HIV/AIDS or bird flu, trafficking in women and children etc. – are global and transnational issues. They cannot be resolved within the borders of a single country nor studied in isolation from the rest of the world. More over the problems and issues of the twenty first century are complex and are not capable of being understood through the prism or perspective of a single discipline. We have to build and deepen global knowledge through insights through comparative and multi-disciplinary perspectives. In the twenty first century credible knowledge can only be built through a two-way exchange of experience and information, through collaborative and comparative research, and based on mutual respect. The West no longer has a monopoly of knowledge production; nor are the developing societies any longer content to be uncritical consumers of knowledge. Knowledge in the twenty first century will have to be collaborative.

No university in the world, no matter how large, good or rich, has all the resources and expertise to address all the big problems confronting our world today. Most, if not all the problems listed above, are transnational and largely located outside the United States and Europe. Moreover these problems are, by their very nature transnational, and not capable of being addressed in a single country. The scholars in the West, in order to remain on the cutting edge of research, will have to work in places outside their homes and will have to collaborate with scholars in distant places. In other words knowledge building will have to be both transnational and collaborative. This offers a huge opportunity for Indian universities to team with scholars around the world and address the big problems of concern to us.

5. Excellence and Access in Higher Education:

I have earlier argued that in a global society based on knowledge the universities will be the engine that will drive our economy. It follows that in a world where skills are scarce every individual, woman or man, must be harnessed to develop their full human potential. As we transform the mouths to feed into hands and brains that are productive and creative, our youth become our most precious national resource. The two biggest challenges facing our universities in the twenty first century are the questions of excellence and access. In other words how do we

build world class colleges and universities and at the same time we ensure that quality higher education is affordable and accessible to all academically gifted students irrespective of their socio- economic backgrounds. Until recently most of the public universities (with some honorable exceptions) were mainly focused on ensuring equitable access but often without adequate concern for quality. The select private universities, on the other hand, strive for quality but are only accessible only to a small minority of students who can afford the enormous fee. Not surprisingly in most developed and developing countries there are two systems of education – for the haves and the have-nots. Those who can afford to pay for education have access to quality education and are assured professional and financial success. To me excellence without equal access is socially reprehensible and not worthy of our societal endeavors.

I have already argued that no academically gifted student should ever be excluded from access to higher education for financial reasons. It is not only a question of social justice – which is important and should not be underestimated – but it is also a matter practical necessity. In a knowledge based economy every skilled person is a precious and scarce resource. In South Asia where almost 40 percent of the population lives in poverty, well over 90 percent of the students never get as far as the university because of lack of access. Such a waste of precious resource is unacceptable, especially in a world where the population is fast ageing and the proportion of productively active persons in our economies is declining. The needless loss of talent is both economically and morally unacceptable. The universities, the governments and the society at large can no longer afford to waste this large pool of potentially productive resource. Making quality higher education accessible to all those capable of benefiting is incumbent upon us.

There is a strong academic reason why bright students from diverse and historically economically disadvantaged background should be given access to quality institutions. It is also in the interest of all the students who attend the universities. Universities are a preparation for life; and it is important that the universities reflect, in a microcosm, the realities of the real world. To create such a learning environment the universities must recruit a genuinely diverse faculty and student body. Creating a truly diverse community is not easy. For diversity to be meaningful the student and faculty diversity must include not only, gender, color, race, religion and nationality – these are all very important – but they must also include social, class and

economic diversity. There must also be room for ideological and intellectual nonconformity. All empirical and pedagogical evidence suggests that students learn best in such diverse institutions. It enables the students to learn from each other, test their ideas and assumptions with those who come from different experiences and to become aware that people presented with the same evidence often come to different conclusions. The experience of international and multicultural dormitories, classes, sports field and clubs helps students to develop interpersonal skills and prepares them for the global world into which they will be entering.

The sad reality, however, is that most universities except for the more enlightened ones continue to draw their students disproportionately from the upper income groups in the society. The children from the top five percent of the income groups occupy nearly 20 percent places in the Ivy League universities in the United States. I would imagine the picture in India is no different. This happens despite the fact that there is no evidence to suggest that intelligence is concentrated in the upper income group. Nor is there any empirical evidence to suggest that the contrary is true either. Indeed the Ford Foundation marked the new millennium by making a grant of three hundred and fifty million dollars to establish an International Fellowship Program targeting the academically brilliant but economically and socially disadvantaged students. The Foundation has developed an extremely sophisticated and calibrated selection process – the ‘dual trip wire’. The application of each candidate is filtered through two separate lenses – academic and socio-economic. Only those candidates, who can successfully cross the ‘dual trip wire’, i.e. demonstrated record of academic brilliance and a verifiable evidence of disadvantage, are allowed to move forward in the selection process. The success of the International Fellowship Program has convinced many institutions to enhance their efforts to recruit students from deprived areas. The New Delhi-based Foundation for Access and Excellence, headed by Professor V. R. Mehta, the founder vice chancellor of Vardhaman Mahaveer University and my most esteemed friend, has demonstrated that not only does talent reside in the most disadvantaged groups of our society but also the institutions that have the vision to admit them have also benefited academically. It requires a commitment, an understanding of the academic value of diversity, and an enlightened self-interest to seek and target students from historically disadvantaged groups. Some wealthy private universities like Harvard have clearly understood the pedagogical value of diverse students and have set aside a percentage of the income from

endowment for bursaries for disadvantaged students. Even public universities like the University of Virginia have through schemes like “Access UVa” not only reached out to disadvantaged groups but in the process the university has helped to raise its own academic standards. Today the University of Virginia vies with the Berkeley for the top position in the league for research universities in the country. To remain academically competitive and to attract high quality students other universities must follow suit.

While social justice and equity are important social values, the argument for diversity is independent of it. Diversity is not about quotas, or lowering the academic quality or the rigor of selection. In fact evidence points to the fact the emphasis on diversity and equity has often helped institutions to raise their SAT and GPA average scores. Many of the best liberal arts colleges in the United States have successfully raised their academic standing in the college league tables by offering merit-based financial aid to enhance campus diversity. The best universities have learned that it pays to be diverse.

And one last point before I move away from the question of diversity, quality and funding. Unless access to quality education – schools, colleges and universities – is guaranteed our societal commitment to create an even playing field will never become a reality. Financial aid and bursaries for disadvantaged but academically brilliant and gifted students should be treated as a fundamental right. However the financial aid and bursary should be both means and academic merit tested – it must not be a quota system nor should it in any way lower the academic rigor and requirements for the socially and historically disadvantaged groups. *However, the means test should not be mean.* The purpose of financial aid and bursary schemes is to create an even playing field in which all students have equal opportunity to develop their fullest potential and creativity without any discrimination.

Scholarships, financial aid and affirmative action to equalize opportunity and access to education are necessary but not sufficient. If we are serious about our commitment to making quality education accessible to all meritorious students irrespective of their financial circumstances, we shall need to think outside the box. We cannot, and must not, hide behind financial constraints. Once we accept that no student who has been accepted for admission on merit will be denied

access for reasons of financial disabilities, the concern for social justice must inform all financial and academic planning of such institutions. Understanding the academic benefits of diversity is the first essential step to solving the problems of financial constraints. After all the students benefit from diverse experience in universities; and it is therefore not at all unfair to ask them to pay for such a benefit just in the same way as they pay for their sports or music facilities. The university administrators, in determining the college fees and tuition, should factor in an extra amount to cover the cost the university incurs in providing a diverse, multicultural and international environment. Neither parents nor tax payers should begrudge the cost. In fact cost incurred in promoting diversity – like the cost of education itself - should not be seen as expenditure but rather as an investment. After all there is an overwhelming statistical evidence to suggest that university graduates earn considerably more than those who do not have university education. And because they earn considerably more, in the overall scheme of things, they give back more in taxes. More over the society can, if it so chooses, impose a graduate tax for continuing investment in higher education. Since the benefits of university education are so much larger, it is doubtful that any person will refuse the opportunity of university education for fear of paying the tax.

Most students pay for their university education through one of three ways: financial aid or philanthropic grant, student loans, and from family support; or through some combination of all three. However, once we begin to take the view that expenditure on education is an *investment*, and grasp the huge returns higher education produces, it should be possible to think of funding quality and accessible higher education through numerous innovative ways. Historically the provision of education has been mainly the responsibility of the government; and the vast majority of the students have been educated in publicly funded institutions. But we know that there are others in society who have a stake in educating the work force, training responsible citizens and families. In other words, in the future, higher education will increasingly need to be provided through public-private collaboration. Most of the university trained workers are employed by the private sector and it is obvious that the private sector also contributes to the investment in education. This might be done through some statutory contribution from the private sector for each graduate employed by them. The market charges for its products and services; and it is only fair that it should pay for graduate services that it uses. In an era where

the ability of governments to raise taxes is limited and the tax base is dwindling around the world, the governments have often cut back on education to reduce budgetary deficits. This is a short sighted policy under any circumstance. But today in knowledge-based economy such a policy is not just short-sighted but suicidal. Our large but young population is our best asset; and the importance of investing in education and training to make our work force productive and innovative is so obvious. There can be no better investment than in education. The government should be able to recover its investments in higher education like scholarships, research grants and capital investments many times over through a life long graduate tax. I am not aware of any form of investment that produces a higher return than higher education. Today we expect to live longer than at any time in history; and most of us with university education also expect to be productively engaged for a long period. We would not be far off the mark to claim that with a four year investment in a student we will assure ourselves handsome returns for a nearly fifty years. Investment in education is the proverbial gift that keeps on giving.

6. With Privileges Come Responsibilities:

Let me now return to our graduating class for whom we are gathered to celebrate. You should be proud of your success. The very fact that you have successfully reached this far is a testament to your ability. You could not have come here without the dint of merit, hard work and perseverance. All of us – your parents and families, teachers and friends share in your pride and applaud your achievements. And as you celebrate your success you might also reflect on your good luck and the opportunities that the universe and nature are about to bestow on you. And along with the celebration, I hope you will also take a moment to reflect on the fact that with privileges come obligations.

It might be worth reminding ourselves today what Socrates (469 – 399 BC) had said nearly twenty five hundred years ago: that ‘the unexamined life is not worth living’. Your education will give you the opportunity to lead a life of reflection and self-examination, the space to discover yourself and to ask yourself who you are and what is important to you. Hopefully, it will enable you to find your passions and to discover what gives you a purpose in life; and most importantly it will, I hope, liberate you from the existence of a robot whose mind parrots inherited wisdom and prejudices. You will have the capacity to think for yourself and you will always be able to discern between what is right and what is wrong. This also means that you will

be responsible for your actions.

Education, as Mahatma Gandhi had said, gives you the capacity for empathy, a feeling and concern about the needs of the others. I do not need to remind you that the diploma that you are about to receive comes with certain responsibilities and obligations. You are uniquely privileged. Your education has already made you a part of the world's tiny privileged elite. It has also given you the capacity to do much good. I hope you understand that not only your family but also the society has made an enormous investment in your education; and it has placed certain legitimate demands on you. At the larger level you have the responsibility to protect and remain true to the core values of our society – social justice, freedom of expression, tolerance, diversity, and the plural democratic process and institutions. What you make of your life and what you do with the opportunity that is being given to you is something that you must decide. The strong have a duty towards the weak, to those who are less privileged than you, and to those that are not able to care for themselves. It is only when you can transcend the self and are able to serve a cause that is larger than yourself that the justification for your privileges is realized.

I hope you will also remember that to those to whom much is given, from them much is expected. Your education will give you what a large part of the humanity can but dream of, and that is reward enough. Your education is a triumph of optimism over cynicism; it is a call to transcend the self in which your satisfaction will come not from self-gratification but from serving others. Your privilege is a call to duty; public service will be your greatest reward. As you consider the privileges and responsibilities, I hope that you will place a strong emphasis on fulfilling those responsibilities through service. Power, wealth, position, fame and glamour are not, and cannot be, the ends in themselves. They are means to an end. The end is the service to others, especially those less fortunate than us. The ultimate fulfillment, let me repeat, is realized when we transcend the self in service of society.

No matter what your destination may be – be it public service or business, diplomacy or the nonprofit, education or management, medicine or engineering, banking or manufacturing, the media or the films – your destiny should be to serve others in whatever way you can. Some are

intimidated by darkness but others choose to light a candle; some will despair because the problems are so overwhelming but others will bring succor and become beacons of hope; and some will cynically accept that injustice, poverty and violence are a part of the society but others will decide to take a stand and fight oppression in any way they can. No matter what you choose, you will have to take sides. There is no neutral ground between good and bad, between justice and injustice. In the struggle against injustice, oppression, poverty, intolerance and ignorance no one can remain neutral. You will be responsible for the choices you make. Once you have been educated you will know that nothing is too small, nor anything too large. What matters is whether you are doing what you can to help those less advantaged than you and to make the world a better place than the one into which you were born. This is what will give your life meaning and will bring lasting satisfaction in everything you do. If you decide to answer the call of duty you will have paid your debt to society.

I wish you joy and God speed as you go forth into the large world. And let me end by reminding you what Herbert Spencer, the English philosopher, had said: 'The great aim of education is not knowledge but action.' Go forth and take action and make the society proud of you.