



**VARDHAMAN MAHAVEER OPEN UNIVERISTY,
KOTA**

**Fifth Convocation
Thursday, April 2, 2009**

Address

by

**His Excellency Shri S K Singh
Governor of Rajasthan
and Chancellor, VMOU**

Kota

2nd April 2009
11.00 AM

Prof. Gowher Rizvi, Prof. Rajasekharan Pillai, Vice Chancellor Naresh Dadhich Distinguished guests, Faculty of our own Open University, Students, Colleagues from the Media, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a pleasure to be with all of you at this Fifth Convocation of our Vardhaman Mahaveer Open University. To all the students and scholars who have earned their degrees for their respective academic accomplishments my greetings, and congratulations. We are all delighted, and feel honoured, that the University is honouring Prof. Gowher Rizvi, a renowned social scientist and a celebrated 'educator of educationists' with the degree of Doctor of Letters (honoris causa). My greetings, salutations, and felicitations to him.

These days, we are being reminded that India is an ancient civilization, but a country of the very young. As of today the bulk of our population is below 35 years of age. Youth power is supposed to be our source of dynamism and innovation, also the desire to do well, and move ahead. Encouraging youngsters from the middleclass to strive, risk and make money is seen as a formula for instant success. This reminds many Anglo-Saxons in Britain and Europe, and the USA to compare younger Indians of today to the younger Americans of mid 19th century when the most conspicuous solitary trait of US boys was their manic energy. During that era industriousness and ambition were adopted, by many ministers of the church as their own "Gospel of Wealth". The Baptist minister Conwell traveled all across the USA in the 1870s, delivering the same sermon on 6000 occasions to wildly enthusiastic, cheering audiences.

Conwell called his sermon "Acres of Diamonds". Conwell also used to say, "Money is power, and it can be available to you without undue trouble and with reasonable ease, if only the youth could cherish the ambition to grasp it; because you do more good with it than you could without it".

I would remind all those who are receiving their degrees today of how some of them could seek and attain this wealth, for the simple reason that the young middle class Indian today quite clearly resembles his American counterpart of the mid 19th century. The same Gospel of Success can be attained by today's enthusiastic young Indian with the normal middleclass background music and bright lights.

There are many aspirational rags-to-riches new stories, that fill up our newspaper column inches today: Dhirubhai Ambanis, Infosys, Reddy's Labs, Ranbaxys, Laxmi Narayan Mittals, Sunil Mittals, which obviously enthuse our youth far more than the somewhat older, more classical names of wealth-makers of yester-year: the Birlas, TATAs, Mahindras, Sarabhais or Bajajs. The businesses spawned by oil and gas, computer software, biotechnology, nano-technology, and automobile ancillaries are stoking ambitions and encouraging the minds and imaginations and sense of new ventures of the Indian youth to take risks and

demonstrate success. The earlier and current Upanishadik scholars and Gandhians of more recent vintage, in our land and culture see in this kind of quest and adventuresome search for material success, a certain vulgarity leading merely to some money making and nothing else, just that without much achievement or satisfaction. However, your quest for higher education along with your vision for democratic vistas is bound to translate itself in a high percentage of examples to emulate where material wealth also does lead to social purposes. There are some very worthwhile examples of success which do not lead merely to material wealth but to great scholastic excellence plus dazzling heights where old wealth and new philosophic innovation can lead not only to a Nobel Prize but also to the bringing together of names like those of Amartya Sen and Baroness Rothschild.

To what extent thereafter you are able to utilize the material wealth and social acclaim won by you, to the ability to help those younger than yourself, and less fortunate, will always depend on how life treats you, and conversely how you treat life.

Convocations of our Universities are meant to build the spirit of partnership in scholarship, and for optimizing fruits of learning; occasions to assess, what further material resources and technologies need to be transferred to our institutions, and how societies and civilizations around the world could build greater congeniality in our world. It is thus that we prepare societies for reconciling globalizing instincts with localizing impulses. It is imperative that the conventional higher education, and Open and Distance Learning systems join together to foster complementary academic accomplishments without in any way compromising any aspects of maintaining quality.

Access to higher education in India has been widened significantly since 1951. The number of Universities has risen from 28 in 1951 to 435 in 2008; the number of degree and post-graduate colleges has gone up to 20,676 (from 750); the student enrolment in the same period, went up from 0.26 million to 11.5 million. The ODL system too records similar upward enrolments rising from 8577 (1951) to 2.0 million by 2003. Even with all these upward trends one needs to recognize that all the increases still cover less than about 10% of the aspirants. The enrolment rate in India stands presently at 613 heads per 1,00,000 people in the age group of 18-23 years. This falls considerably below the averages of other developing regions like Latin America (1638 heads per 1,00,000 people) and the Middle East and North America (1465 heads per 1,00,000 people). If we view the contexts of Europe, Central Asia and the USA the picture acquires far gloomier overtones. In Europe and Central Asia the enrolment rests at 2436 heads per 1,00,000 people while in the case of the USA, it is 5339 heads per 1,00,000 people. One needs to wonder what the cost would be in effort and financial outlay for our society if we were to raise the enrolment

from the rate of 7.5% to our desired rate of 20% level by 2010. The question of over-all rate of budgetary and manpower resources will force people to repeat the hardy annual question: Can we afford this? And if yes, within what time-frame are we able to produce financial resources and man-power of adequate quality?

Other questions too will have to be asked and replied to. Could the Open Universities and the ODL system in general be expected to step in to further broaden our society's access to higher technical and technological education in India? Could it be ensured that technology-intensive systems of open and distance learning reach and satisfy the academic needs of the disadvantaged, and economically weaker sections of our society residing in remote rural areas? And can this objective be achieved with lower financial investment and greater returns in terms of access and productivity.

Would it be feasible to ensure that distance education balances the academic demands of the disadvantaged as well as certain elitist segments of our society simultaneously? Indeed we will need, for coming to a realistic judgment on this point, also enter the aspect of catering to e-learning and audio-video conferencing along with developing print material for neo-literates, semi-skilled and 'second chance of education' desiring segments of our society. Thus, printed learning material and electronified learning material has to function together to satisfy the diverse pedagogic needs of the learners. Manual instructional endeavors have to coincide with updated mechanical operations. This 'Inclusive' strategy at distance education management can develop and foster a viable access and equity towards learning.

Distance education through Open Universities has to produce knowledge besides imparting skills to those who seek it. The conventional academic packages have to be supplemented with short-term skill imparting certifications. I am happy to note that the Vardhaman Mahaveer Open University is collaborating with Rajasthan Mission on Livelihood (R-MoL), Jaipur and Rajasthan Knowledge Corporation, Ltd (RKCL), Jaipur to cater to this important requirement. The University as the sole ODL establishment in our State needs assiduously to reach the hitherto un-reached in order to empower and upgrade the marginalized segments of Rajasthan's society.

Quality Assurance is another critical issue, which deserves to be upheld in all academic pursuits. It is imperative that the Distance Education Council builds norms for the standardization of programmes, degrees and learning packages. The norms would need to be applied with the same vigour as the UGC has been trying in respect of its own norms for normal Universities. Our State Open University needs to be academically attuned to its stated objectives with Distance Education Council being the central monitoring authority.

The idea of an Open University or “Wireless University” was born when BBC started in the late 1920s with the help of Institution of Electrical Engineers in Britain to combine broadcast lectures with correspondence texts. With their visits to conventional universities it became a genuinely multi media concept. It all underwent several alterations by 1960 when Micheal Young, Lord Taylor, Jennie Lee, the Minister for Arts, and Harold Wilson, Leader of the Labour Party proposed an experiment on radio and television through a ‘University of the Air’ for serious, planned, adult education. These were all idealists who were pleading and lobbying for higher education for intelligent and ambitious youth from the lower income groups in Britain. Jennie Lee traveled also to Chicago in the USA, and Moscow and found that their systems were a kind of routine long-tem broadcasting inter-twined with some correspondence courses. Minister Jennie Lee came from a disadvantage background herself and was conscious of conservative vested interests of the academic world.

By 1966-67 the Labour Government was able to workout a comprehensive and workable plan for an Open University. Even until 1988 the promoters of this concept found that their idealistic and revolutionary ideas on which it was based attracted criticism. By now the Open University idea had convinced skeptics that academic excellence need not be compromised by openness.

Of all the rest of the world Nigeria was the one non-British country, which made its own experiments in this context during 1887-2003 i.e. more than a period of 116 years. However they took a slightly different path to promote their system by demonstrating their teaching methodology at the Teacher’s Training College, Oyo, then affiliated to the University of Ibadan.

It is my hope and expectation that amongst all these experiments, ours in India, specially the experiment which began with Dr. B.R.Ambedkar Open University in Hyderabad, and proceeded through Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi, Karnataka State Open University, Mysore, Netaji Subhas Open University, Calcutta, and the Open University in Kota where we are today is beginning to show the educational world how idealism, pragmatic thinking and devotion to the Gandhian principles and practice of wiping every tear from every eye through an effort to serve humanity with Truth and non-violence as our instruments. We have benefited from the presence and counsel of Prof Gohwer Rizvi who has been generous in sharing his thoughts with us. It is this that makes me refer to Gohwer Bhai as an educator of educationists, and in that spirit this University, he must have noticed, stands ready to learn from him.

JAI HIND