



4th Convocation

Saturday, 2nd June, 2018

Convocation Address

by

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at

IIHMR University, Jaipur

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Chairman of the IIHMR University, President of the University, Registrar, members of the academic Bodies, faculty members, invited guests, graduating students, their proud parents, ladies and gentlemen!

I am happy to be in your midst this morning and thank the university administration for according me the privilege of addressing the fourth convocation of the university. I am impressed by the progress made by IIHMR in relatively a short period of time. Beginning from an institute of teaching and research in the area of healthcare management, it is now a full-fledged university under the state legislature and the university has carved out a niche for itself. This would have been possible because of the visionary founder also because of his ability and inclination to involve in the endeavour the best and brightest minds of the country. I pay my respect to all those who have worked so hard to help this university grow and develop into a premier centre for teaching, research and capacity building in its chosen areas of focus.

I am reminded of the story of a man who despite being feeble, due to his advanced age was seen toiling day and night to plant trees that would take a long time to give shade or bear fruits. Wise villagers would laugh and mock at him, for they thought that he has gone senile and has lost his mind. They thought it was time for him to rest or do something which should give him gratification in his life time. One day, some of the village folks approached him as asked: "... why are you tiring yourself and wasting your time on something that you would not live to benefit from? Do you really expect to live long enough to sit under the shade of these trees or be able to taste the fruits of your labour?" The old man replied: "I know that the

good time for the plantation was when I was young, but I also know that the best time is now. I was born into a world flourishing with ready pleasures. My ancestors planted for me, and now I plant for my children”.

The moral of the story is aptly summed up in a Greek proverb that a society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit under or whose fruits they shall never taste. The society grows greater when old men plant not only for their immediate kith and kin but for the humanity at large. It becomes the best when old men plant for the education and health of the generations to follow. Our civilization owes a great deal to such visionaries and their selfless toil.

Dear Students! Today is the most memorable day of your life. You were wise enough to plant at a good time. Your investment of time and toil has grown to bear fruit when you are still young enough to consume them for a long time. You worked hard to earn your degree and today you are being declared qualified to reap the fruits of your labour. Harvesting time is the occasion for celebration. Rejoice at your victory. Heartiest Congratulations to you and to your parents on this accomplishment.

You are now leaving the portals of this university to enter into the world of work which is full of promises but is also notorious for exposing you to many dangers. This university has given you a lot including this piece of paper we call degree. This degree is merely a piece of paper with no resale value. At the same time, it is worth more than what you can imagine. It draws its value from the promise that it carries, and that shall be the case so long as it has the acceptability in the world of work and knowledge. In another sense, it is no more than an entry pass to a destination full of possibilities and opportunities. You shall be able to capitalize on the opportunities and possibilities only if you actually have the knowledge and skills that this piece of paper purports you to have. Degrees are important but what is more important are your abilities, your inclination, your motivation.

You will now have to chart your own career path and also as to what you want to become. From now on, you will have to take the responsibility of your actions. Your teachers shall not be there to guide you to the right path. Money and wealth are important in life, but they can never be the ultimate goals or purpose of our life. They may provide you material comforts but would not necessarily make you happy. They may enable you to afford the fastest means of communication and transportation but would not necessarily lead you to right destination. They may enable you to have the best house in the town but would not necessarily guarantee you the peace of mind. All that glitters is not necessarily gold. Realize that some of the most enticing, eye catching colourful berries in the bushes could also be poisonous.

Choose your path carefully on tread on it cautiously. March ahead with commitment and dedication. Be patient when you face obstacles, for every path, howsoever, carefully chosen and cautiously treaded occasionally bring you face to face with challenges. In your journey of life, you shall come across many a fellow travellers. Some of them may be mighty and powerful; face them bravely with courage and conviction; never cow down to their whims and fancies; never give in to their illegitimate demands. Others may be weak and humble; empathize with them and be compassionate.

Appreciate and support when you see justice being done. Rise to the occasion when circumstances demand you to take sides with justice. I hope and wish that your long years of education has developed in you the ability to make rational choices about your own life and lives of others. Having spent long years in a University that owes its genesis to the untiring and selfless work of its founders, I am sure you would be able to take right decisions at right time and would walk on this earth with your head held high.

Ladies and Gentlemen! India should take pride in having made remarkable progress in higher education and also in the fact that much of this progress has been attained only after Independence. With nearly 900 Universities, around 40,000 Colleges and 11,669 Stand-alone higher educational institutions, ours is simply the largest single system of higher education found anywhere in the world. This counts for a huge progress since Independence, as we in the country then had no more than 500 colleges and just a little more than two dozen universities in 1950. Even in terms of enrolments, ours is the second largest system of higher education with the number of students enrolled in our higher educational institutions already exceeding 3.57 Crores which is simply way too high as compared to about one lakh students that were enrolled in our higher educational institutions in 1950. Speaking in relative terms, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education has gone up from less than one percent in 1950 to over 25.2 percent currently.

Even in terms of equity and inclusion, the second most critical aspect, our performance so far has been no less impressive. Gender parity index, which measures the ratio of men and women in higher education, is now close to 1, which in simple words means that women are almost equal in number as compared to men as far as enrolment in higher education is concerned. No less remarkable is the increase in access to higher education by the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes which is reflected by the GER of 21.1 and 15.4 percent respectively. Though still less than the national average, the progress since Independence has been quite satisfactory. Apparently, affirmative action and enabling policies in this regard have been right steps in the right direction.

The above accomplishments notwithstanding, we are still faced with the challenges of further expanding our higher education system to ensure access by all. Though we have a large number of higher educational institutions, their dispersion across different regions, states and

geographies is still not uniform, thereby indicating that the policies of further expansion shall continue to mitigate regional and geographic imbalances. At the same time a very large number of higher educational institutions has also led to a situation where there are a large number of very small-sized higher educational institutions which invariably impact delivery of high quality higher education. Similarly, though the participation of women has substantially increase, there are still institutions and discipline where their participation rate is significantly lower than the national average. The situation calls for more concerted efforts to make girl students access quality higher education across all higher educational institutions and across all disciplines. It is also important to note that there are certain marginalised sections of the society, particularly the Muslim minorities whose participation rate in higher education is way below the desired level or even the national average. Obviously, we need to do a lot to address these challenges through policy initiatives and proactive approaches.

Our accomplishments in the areas of expansion and equity are shadowed by the perceived lack of quality and excellence in higher education. We have a small number of very high quality higher educational institutions and programmes but they are like islands of excellence in the sea of mediocrity. Even the best of our higher educational institutions compare poorly with the best of the world. Thus, our challenges are two-fold in this regard. First, we have to promote excellence in the best of our higher educational institutions, such that they compete on equal footing with the best of the world and are thus reckoned amongst the top higher educational institutions of the world. Secondly, we have to work to improve the quality of all higher educational institutions so as to reduce the quality gaps between the best and the rest, so that on an average a reasonably decent quality of higher education could be provided to all the students in the country.

It is not that the policy planners and regulators are oblivious to the national needs; they in fact work overtime to ensure that the nation rises to meet all the challenges faced in the field of higher education. It is believed that the quality of higher education is critical for the development of the country in future and that India being a young nation must not miss the opportunity of reaping the demographic dividend.

Some of the recent initiatives taken by the government seem worth mentioning. The announcements in the budget regarding PM's Fellowship is a step in the right direction. The idea of investing Rs 1 lakh crores for improving the infrastructure for higher education and research is also laudable, though the details as to how the resources would be mobilized is still awaited. The idea to identify select universities to be recognized as institutions of eminence and then to fund them adequately and to provide them with necessary enabling and empowering conditions is seen as a remarkable initiative and it is hoped that it shall be implemented earnestly and urgently. Realization that too much control and micromanagement acts as a barrier in promoting excellence in higher education and thus the idea of granting graded, though gradually, autonomy to performing universities ought to be welcome. The initiatives to reform the accreditation process to the extent it reduces objectivity is also good but the idea to involve a large number of agencies in the process is untried so far.

Lastly, one thing that both the Central as well as the State Governments must do, but have not been paying the due attention to, is enhancing the public investment in higher education. Private participation has become necessary but leaving everything to the private sector is not likely to work. The governments must commit to rapidly increase their public investment on higher education so that it reaches the level of a minimum of two percent of the GDP and the State Domestic Product (SDP). India has remarkable potential. Our population and demography present a unique opportunity and we must harness our fullest potential.

Ladies and Gentlemen! I have already taken a lot of your time and I thank you for your kind indulgence. I travelled more than two thousand five hundred kilometers to be in your midst and have taken only one minute per one hundred kilometer of my travel out of your precious time.

I conclude by once again congratulating each of the graduating students and their parents and also by thanking the management of the university, in particular the esteemed Chancellor, the Vice Chancellor and Registrar, who I know was instrumental in my coming here, for giving me this honour.
