



Address by the President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee special convocation of University of Mumbai and Conferment of Honorary D.Litt. on Dr M. S. Swaminathan

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I am happy to be here today for the special convocation of the University of Mumbai, which is one of the first three universities to be set up in India. This historic institution is a beacon of knowledge and scholarship. It has produced illustrious individuals in all fields. Amongst its alumni are several tall leaders of our freedom movement including Mahatma Gandhi; reformers; scientists, academicians; industrialists; legal luminaries, artistes; and public servants. The students of this university constitute as well as contribute to its continuing heritage of excellence. A degree from this institution is a privilege, which only the bright and the talented earn through their hard work and application of mind.

Ladies and gentlemen:

2. This university through the conferment of Honorary D. Litt has always recognized leaders who have played a transformational role in various fields. It includes eminent scholars and social reformers like Sir R.G. Bhandarkar, Dadabhai Naoroji, Sir C.V. Raman and Sir M. Visvesvaraya. It is a proud moment for me today to have conferred the Honorary D. Litt upon one of India's greatest scientists, Dr. M.S. Swaminathan. I have known Dr. Swaminathan as well as closely interacted with him on issues of national importance, on many occasions during the past five decades. His work brought about a sea-change in the life of our nation. It is due to his pioneering efforts that our country transformed from its status of ship-to-mouth existence to one of the leading producers and exporters of food grains in the world.

3. Over a period of 65 years, Dr. Swaminathan has worked in collaboration with scientists and policy-makers on a wide range of problems in basic and applied plant genetics and agricultural R&D. Among his important contributions include: conservation of plant genetic resources and biodiversity; identification of barriers to high yields; modification of genes to improve yield, quality and stability of crops; identification of cytotoxic agents in irradiated food material and demonstration of indirect effects of radiations; organization of Lab-to-Land programmes, and management of drought. He has always been complimented upon as a global scientist of rare distinction because of the indelible mark he has made on food production in India and elsewhere in the developing world. His advocacy of sustainable agriculture leading to an ever-green revolution makes him an acknowledged world leader in the field of sustainable food security. For his visionary work, Dr. Swaminathan has been bestowed upon important national and international awards.

Ladies and gentlemen:

4. The twenty-first century is expected to be an 'Asian century' with the Asian countries regaining their pre-eminence in the world through all-round development. The post Eighties' performance of the Asian economies is a symbol of this Asian resurgence. One of the important elements that has guided in this journey is education and new knowledge.

5. Economies that have performed beyond the traditional growth sectors are the knowledge economies. It is knowledge that has driven and will drive growth and development in the years ahead. In this scenario, the institutions of higher learning and their linkages with counterparts in other parts of the world are of critical importance. India with its historic seats of learning like Nalanda or Takshashila stood not merely for quality education but also for global co-operation.

6. The higher education sector has a crucial role in the national developmental effort. Being the storehouse of traditional wisdom, as also the nursery of new knowledge, the higher education eco-system will influence the various growth centres of the economy.

Ladies and gentlemen:

7. Growth of the economy depends on higher education in important ways. The quality of training provided to students employed by the economy determines the level of its competence. Induction of quality manpower is the first point of contact that the economy has with the higher education system. The graduates have to meet the skill-set requirements of the domestic economy. The course work in our campuses must be aligned to the needs of the industry. It will be beneficial to have corporate experts advising academic managers on industrial requirements in the course curricula.

8. A vast quantum of knowledge is created in the tertiary education system through research. They find application in society through industrial and other sectors. A robust industrial linkage, according to me, provides an efficient mechanism for transfer of knowledge from the higher education system to the economic system.

Ladies and gentlemen:

9. Industry-academia collaborations have focused mainly on conferences, training of industrial employees, internship of students, adjunct faculty positions for industry experts, and transfer of academically created intellectual property to business enterprises through licensing. While these are important, the industry-academia

interface must also focus on high intensity linkages like research partnerships, shared incubators and research parks. A strong relationship between an institution of higher learning and an industrial enterprise can spur further expansion of the spheres of collaboration.

10. I am pleased to note that the University of Mumbai has taken a holistic view in this connection. Not only is it developing newer programmes which will prepare its students to face the challenges of the changing economy; it is also investing in creating an eco-system conducive to basic research and to incubate innovation. The vision of the Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Sanjay Deshmukh, to prepare the Master Plan of the University for its infrastructural and R&D make-over, is noteworthy. Looking at the initiatives the university has undertaken in its 160th year - be it the establishment of the Centre for Railway Research; or the Film and Media Entertainment Training academy; or its programmes in sports management, aviation, leadership development, or fire-fighting; or successfully aligning itself to the government initiatives like 'Skill India', 'Digital India' and 'Make in India', - it is poised to partner effectively in the nation's developmental effort.

11. Great educational institutions require good faculty and administrators. University of Mumbai has been historically able to attract and recruit outstanding teachers, students and work force. Its ability to impart organized knowledge in a systematic manner for so many years has been because of the presence of leading scholars of their time as faculty, and as a dynamic student community.

Ladies and gentlemen:

12. Ancient India was known for the high level of philosophical debate and discussion it nurtured. India was not a mere geographical expression but it reflected an idea and a culture. Conversation and dialogue are part of our ethos and life. They cannot be done away with. Universities and higher education institutions are the best fora for free exchange of views.

13. Mahatma Gandhi had said and I quote: *"I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any"* (unquote). We should embrace free conversation and even argument, leaving behind narrow mindsets and thoughts. The lesson for a modern Indian university is to ensure that this great tradition finds new life and vigour within its precincts. There should be no room for intolerance, prejudice and hatred within the spaces of our educational institutions. They must act as flag bearers for the co-existence of multiple views, thoughts and philosophies.

Ladies and gentlemen:

14. A good education system is one that can help develop social responsiveness in students. Ways should be devised to integrate student engagement with society in the academic framework. For instance, higher level students can be assigned to teach in government schools located nearby. Students can also be deployed to undertake community-based projects. They can identify problems and involve themselves in research to find solutions. Measures like these would mould students into confident and purposeful human beings who can, through their conviction and own example, inspire others. I call upon the faculty and students to internalise the values of selfless service and service before self, and instil them in everyone whose lives they touch.

15. With these words, I conclude. I express my gratitude for being given this rare opportunity to confer the Honorary D. Litt. of University of Mumbai to Dr. M.S. Swaminathan. Wishing you all success in your endeavours!

Thank you.

Jai Hind.

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