



# Speech of the President on the occasion of Annual Convocation of IGNFA

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It is indeed a great pleasure to be present amidst you on the occasion of the convocation of the Indian Forest Service Officers of the batch of 2015-17. Convocation is no doubt a landmark day in your life as you graduate from formal training and leave the portals of your alma mater in service of the Nation. It is also a landmark event for your teacher, parents and friends. Constituted under the All India Service Act of 1951, the Indian Forest Service, has the unique responsibility of not only overseeing and supervising the huge bio-diversity of India, but also the diverse culture, traditions and livelihoods associated with this bio-diversity.

2. Situated in this Green Doon Valley, I am sure that the Indira Gandhi National Forest Academy, would have amply inculcated skills and training amongst the officers and groomed them to deliver their best in the service of the country and humanity as a whole. Indeed, the fact that, the Academy is one of the premier institutions of higher education in the field of forestry, goes a long way in testifying its core-competency.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

3. Owing to the great bio-diversity in flora, fauna and wildlife, India is rightfully known as the 'Heaven on Earth'. While our forests provide for water, clean oxygen and various herbal plants, our wildlife sustains that very essential food chain, that is essential for maintenance of ecology.

Friends,

4. The importance attached to the sustenance and maintenance of our ecology and bio-diversity has transcended ages. The Atharvaveda mentions that "our land should be so fertile that the yield taken from it should be recuperated very soon and it should not be harmed by any activity of ours". Forest management is an important aspect in Indian cultural and ethos. This thought takes back even to the times of Chandragupta Maurya. If it was relevant in those days, it is relevant even today when the world is facing the challenges of sustainable development.

5. However, the earlier colonial period witnessed uncontrolled deforestation and exploitation of forest resources in the larger game of 'drain of wealth'. Once the colonial masters realized that the exploitation of such resources could not go on forever, the Imperial Forest Department for Scientific Forest Management was established in the year 1864. While initially, the officers of the Imperial Forest Department were sent to France, Germany and Britain for a two-year training, in 1926, the Imperial Forest Research Institute was established in Dehradun.

Ladies & Gentlemen and the Officers passing out today,

6. I sought to draw your attention to the more than 100 year old history of Modern Indian Forestry to underline the enormous legacy that you will be joining. You are now part of a greater tradition and you must live up to its standards.

Friends,

7. Today, India has an area of 79.4 million hectares designated as forests. This is about 19.32 % of the country. The Forest Policy of the year 1952, calls for maintaining one third of the total land of the country as forest cover. This clearly indicates a gap of about 15%, which has to be bridged. In fact, to achieve this goal of 33% of forest cover was one of the professed goals behind setting up the Indian Forest Service in 1966, and it is time that concrete measures are ensured in this direction.

8. As I said earlier, the Indian Forest Service does not only have the responsibility of serving the sector of forestry in the country, but a much larger onus of arresting climate change apart from preservation of bio-diversity and enhancement of forest cover and encouraging forest based livelihood. It is indeed a matter of satisfaction that, aided by technology like e-surveillance and GIS application along with the hard work being put in by the officers of the Indian Forest Service, the forest cover in the country has increased from 64.2 million hectares in 1987 to 79.4 million hectares, as per recent reports. While this is a tremendous achievement in itself, but yet there are many more miles to be covered.

Friends,

9. The responsibility of carrying on this task is in your hands now, and at this juncture, I would like to draw your attention to four aspects of your job, that have assumed greater significance to the national life and humanity at large:-

i) The first call of your job should be to protect the forests, enhance its productivity and support the local populace in terms of their requirements from the forests, by the means of scientific interventions. Climate change has emerged as a major global issue, as we all know. Its impact on the poor, due to their limited capacity to cope with it, assumes paramount significance. Since forests are known to moderate local climate effects, protecting people from natural disasters, in addition to providing supplementary income to local population, your job should be to preserve these effective tools to counter climate change.

ii) The second aspect you need to focus on is to enhance the delivery mechanism of your unit. Efficiency and efficacy should be the corner stone in the discharge of your responsibilities. When people come to you with a problem, you should put in your best efforts to solve their issues in a professional manner. The files put up before you are not merely bunch of papers, they contain people's aspirations, someone's dream and someone's livelihood. Governance with a human face and efficiency should be the hallmark of an All India Service, like yours.

iii) Thirdly, you should continuously strive to enhance your personal capacity and that of your subordinate staff, to improve upon delivery. This would be possible by upgrading your technical skill sets and revisiting the laid down procedures followed by your subordinate staff so as to find scope for improvement by using appropriate technology. I am confident that your training in IGNFA would have given you ample exposure to understand cross-sectoral linkages so that means could be devised to harness synergy in the delivery of services.

iv) Last, but not the least. You will have to provide expert solutions to the development versus conservation debates. In this debate, the first thing that we need to understand is that, though apparently contradictory, development and conservation are not antithetical. They can very much go hand-in-hand. People often take a stand on side of environment or development. However, both of these need to be seen as complementary and not antagonistic. The solution to this issue is inclusive development which factors in the importance of environmental aspects in the developmental agenda.

10. While I am confident that your training at IGNFA would have equipped you to handle all these aspects effectively, the talisman given by Mahatma Gandhi that “Earth provides enough to satisfy every man’s need but not every man’s greed” (unquote) should guide you in every decision you take in the discharge of your duties. We have no right to destroy the resources of Mother Earth which we have inherited.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

11. I congratulate all of you once again for successful completion of your training program today. My best wishes are with you for all times to come. Always remember to be just, rights and honest in your decisions.

12. Before I conclude, young officers, I wish you Godspeed in your endeavours!

Thank you,

Jai Hind.

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