

UNIVERSITY



OF MYSORE

CONVOCAATION ADDRESS

BY

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YOUR HIGHNESS THE CHANCELLOR, MR. VICE-
CHANCELLOR, FELLOWS AND GRADUATES OF
THE MYSORE UNIVERSITY,

I DEEPLY appreciate the honour of being invited to address this Convocation. Allow me at the outset to express my thanks to His Highness the Chancellor. I have been a teacher for nearly forty years, and a student for an even longer period, and I have been associated closely with more than one University. Any occasion which takes me out to a University is naturally a welcome one to me. When further the occasion brings me to a part of the country, so rich in academic traditions as your State is, it has a certain special appeal. In my mind the picture of Mysore is so richly clothed with memories that I cherish, of Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, Madhva and Basava, four of our greatest āchāryas, of Vidyāranya and Akshobhya Muni, of Doddāchārya and Parakāla, which are venerable names indeed, and of philosopher kings like Krishnadeva Rāya and Chikkadeva Rāya. Some of them were not of your State, but came here because they found here a congenial atmosphere for their intellectual and academic pursuits. Indeed almost any new intellectual or academic movement in India—with a certain characteristic modesty, we always regarded all new movements as just a renaissance—could from a very early period look to this part of the country for proper nurturing. Śravana Belgola and Śringeri, Yadugiri,

Udipi and Śrīśaila grew indeed as such nurturing centres, and continue to be such even now—thanks to His Highness your Chancellor and many of his distinguished predecessors. In many parts of the country the word Karnataka is today almost a synonym for the word classical, as for example in music, where it is used generally to contrast it with the Deśīya, always to the disadvantage of the latter.

The great academic traditions that I mentioned just now are indeed our common heritage, and their roots go back to a very remote past, and they also extend far beyond the confines of our country. There is no parallel in the world of a continuity of such rich academic traditions, and over such a long period. I shall illustrate it with a typical example.

In the *Taittirīya Upanishad* there is a convocation address to the outgoing graduates, which is as modern today as it was when it was delivered more than three thousand years ago. The Sanskrit scholars have a felicitous way of expressing this sentiment. The word *purāna* means just old or ancient. With a genius for deriving new meanings from old words—to which the language also lends itself easily—the scholars would take the word *purāna* to mean also *purāpi nava*—even more fresh than before. I heard recently one of our ministers derive the word *sanātana* similarly from *sadā nutana*, i.e., eternally new. Apart from the propriety or otherwise of these derivations, the description *purāpi nava*, i.e., more modern, more fresh, than ever before, would

certainly apply appropriately to the *Taittiriya* convocation address to which I referred just now. It is quoted frequently by our educationists, and indeed there have been few convocation addresses delivered in recent years in which this is not quoted.

My object here is not so much to refer to this address, but to some verses that immediately precede it in the *Taittirīya Upanishad*. These verses, for some reason, are not so well known, but, in my opinion, they are even more significant academically than the oft-quoted address.

These verses report a conference of three rishis. The report is short and crisp and is complete in just three short sentences. The question is posed as to what is *tapas*; which obviously is conceded by all the three rishis as the highest ideal. The first rishi to express his view is Rāthitara, and he opines that *satyam* is the essence of *tapas*: *satyam iti satyavachā rāthitharah*. The Sanskrit word *satyam* does not merely connote truthfulness. *Yathā drishṭa artham, hitharoopa vacanam*. The contents should be to the best of one's personal knowledge, and the wording of it should be such as to serve the best interests of humanity. Hence *satyam* would be a lofty ideal indeed, not only for governing the conduct of individuals but also of nations. This has been amply demonstrated by the living example of the Father of our Nation. But obviously even this lofty ideal does not quite satisfy the author of the Upanishad. He adds with a characteristically delicate humour

“Remember that Rāthītara is a specialist.” He qualifies Rāthītara by adding that, he is a *satya-vachā*; his speciality is *satyam*. If you had asked him what is *dharma* he would still have answered *satyam*. It is like going to a dentist. Whether it is pain in your throat, or inflammation of your eyes, or upset of your digestion, he would examine the teeth first. In the same sense, according to the author of the Upanishad, satyavachā’s first response would always be for *satyam*.

The next rishi is Pauruśiṣṭi, who is an even more narrow specialist. *Thapa iti thaponityaḥ pauruśiṣṭiḥ*. He is a *thaponitya*. If you ask him what is *tapas*, he feels genuinely embarrassed. “*Tapas* is *tapas*. By what more appropriate word can you describe it?” It is like asking a physicist “What is electricity?” He would probably give a long lecture and conclude with some statement like this: “You know what I mean. Electricity is electricity.”

Tapa iti tapōnithaḥ pauruśiṣṭiḥ
reports just such an answer.

The third rishi is Nāka, who is Mudgala’s son, and is therefore described as Maudgalya. His opinion is given next.

Swādhyāya pravacane eveti nāko maudgalyaḥ.

Swādhyāya and *pravacana*, they and they alone, according to him, constitute real *tapas*. The author of the Upanishad has obviously very pronounced views of his own, and the wording of the report of

the conference leaves you in no doubt about his views. While reporting the first two rishis, he goes out of the way to warn the reader that they are the views of narrow specialists, and by implication that they are likely to be biased. But when he reports Maudgalya he significantly refrains from making any such suggestion. Consistently with the manner in which he introduced the first two speakers to the reader he could have introduced Nāka, the third speaker with some such words as this :

Swādhyāya pravacana nirataḥ nākaḥ Maudgalyaḥ.

He does not do this ; on the contrary, he lets him affirm, with great confidence, that *swādhyāya* and *pravacana*, and they alone, constitute real *tapas*.

Swādhyāya means learning, i.e., acquiring knowledge in the best academic traditions, by listening to great teachers, by research, by study, by contemplation. *Pravachana* means imparting knowledge, by conducting classes, by lectures, by demonstrations, by publications.

The author of the Upanishad leaves you in no doubt, as to his own thesis. It is just the thesis of Maudgalya. Lest there be some one among the readers who has no sense of humour, on whom the point of the thesis might be lost, the Upanishad takes no risk, and raises its hand and shouts out in a language the purport of which even the philistine cannot miss :

taddhi tapas taddhi tapaḥ

that verily is *tapas*, that verily is *tapas*.

Like all great teachers that wish to bring home an important point, the Upanishad reverts frequently to this thesis. The actual convocation address to which I referred earlier, follows soon after this, in which the teacher exhorts :

swādhyāyān mā pramadaḥ

and a little later

swādhyāyā pravacanābhyām na pramaditavyam

It should be remembered that this is not addressed to the incoming students, but to the graduates that are leaving the University. Indeed the Upanishad fights shy of referring to them as graduates. It describes them as *anthevasinaḥ*—the inmates of the āśram, those that have shared the life of the āśram with the teacher, i.e. colleagues in a noble endeavour. Since the address is to the departing graduates, the emphasis is first on continuing to learn *swādhyāyān mā pramadaḥ*.

Never desist from learning. Learning is a continuing process, which should extend over the whole of one's life. It is only later that the teacher adds

Swādhyāya pravacanābhyām na pramaditavyam

Let there be no neglect of either learning or teaching.

Finally, the teacher invokes all the persuasive nuances of the language to impress on the graduates the nobility of the ideal. I advise you, I implore you, I beseech you, and many others in the same strain : *eṣa ādeśaḥ, eṣa upadeśaḥ, eṣa vedōpaniṣat, etad anuśasanam, evam upāsitavyam, evam u caitad upāsyam.*

What a teacher! What a noble ideal! We too in our occasional expansive moods speak in almost the same language about the noble profession of teaching, but we seem almost to resent that the profession has to be dependent on teachers at all! I remember an old Punch cartoon which represents the parents of a boy pleading with the Headmaster of his School for the extension of some unreasonable privileges to the boy, and the Headmaster retorts "I have always maintained that parents are the last people who should have anything to do with children." By a tragic irony, we seem to feel concerned in the same way, that the profession of teaching, which we pompously hold is so noble, should have anything to do with teachers.

It reminds me of a tragic episode in the life of our great mathematician Ramanujan. Many people have claimed to have discovered Ramanujan long before he became well known as the most outstanding mathematician that we had ever produced. And yet they had allowed him to earn his living as a clerk. That seems to be almost typical of our attitude towards our teachers in many parts of the country. I hope it is a passing phase.

Coming back to the Upanishad, one is naturally tempted to pose the question, "What were regarded as appropriate courses of study in those early days?" Here again nothing short of the very best would satisfy the Upanishadic teacher.

*sa brahmaidhyām sarvavidyāpratiṣṭhām atharvāya
jyeṣṭhaputrāya prāha*

It has to be of course *brahma-vidyā*, i.e., supreme knowledge, which is the basis of all knowledge, and the author enumerates later the courses of study, that would enable one to attain this supreme knowledge. The studies prescribed include what the Upanishad designates as *parā-vidyā*, the type of knowledge that would enable one to attain immortality.

This is indeed to be expected from the Upanishad and is in our best traditions. It reminds one of the well-known śloka *Tat karma yannabandhāya sāvidyā yā vimukthaye āyāsāya aparam karma vidyā anyā silpanaipunam*. A good deed is that which does not entangle you, but if you are one of those lucky ones whose conscience is satisfied that they have done a good day's work when they feel tired, then almost any work will serve that purpose. *āyāsāya aparam karma*. The sloka is from Vishnu Purāna. Whoever suspected it of lack of humour! In the same spirit the sloka adds: that is real knowledge which helps to liberate the soul. Any other knowledge amounts at best to technical proficiency.

Consistently with these traditions one naturally expects the Upanishad to emphasise the *parā vidyā*. But what is very significant is that the Upanishad prescribes *aparā vidyā* i.e., secular knowledge too as an essential part of *brahma vidyā*: *dve vidye veditavye iti ha sma yad brahma vido vadanti, para caiva aparā ca*. Both kinds of knowledge *have to be known*, that is what knowers of Brahman declare. I am merely translating the Upanishad.

Under the category of *aparā vidyā*, the Upanishad includes the humanities, the arts and the sciences, and it is noteworthy even the so called religious literature like the vedas is included under *aparā vidyā* in this enumeration.

This is not very different in essentials—I repeat in essentials—from the aims of a modern University. My main purpose here is to emphasise the continuity of our academic traditions; and with this rich heritage of academic traditions how natural it should be for us to take to any field of academic endeavour whether it be the humanities or the arts, or modern sciences or technology. In any case the best academic ideals of today are by no means alien to us.

The emphasis naturally will shift frequently from one branch to another. To-day the tendency all over the world, even in some of the most ancient Universities of the west, seems to be towards the sciences and technology. Apart from its being inevitable, this shift in emphasis towards the sciences would also be eminently desirable for purely academic reasons.

As a means of acquiring a truly liberal education the humanities and the arts were generally regarded as in some ways superior to the sciences. Most educationists would concede today that the cultural value of the sciences is in no way inferior to that of the humanities and the arts. This is so not only in the case of the pure sciences, but in the case of technology too. Intellectual integrity by which I mean the

willingness to face facts squarely and to draw logical conclusions from them, and to accept them without mental reservations and to act in a manner that would conform to such an unreserved acceptance, is an essential part of any liberal education, and it is much more readily acquired through the cultivation of the sciences than through other disciplines ; because nature is the most dependable teacher. She may be profound, and oftentimes difficult to understand, but she invariably plays the game. And a really scientific outlook is more readily acquired by our contacts with nature than through other disciplines.

Indeed some eminent educationists, like the great mathematician and philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead, who obviously cannot be suspected of any undue leanings towards technology, would regard technical education as even superior to the study of pure sciences and to the study of the humanities, in enabling one to acquire a truly liberal education.

In a series of essays published many years ago under the title 'aims of education', Professor Whitehead develops very convincingly this thesis. According to him technical education manages to combine the Platonic ideal of knowledge for its own sake and what he calls the Benedictine ideal of the joy of useful work; technical education, according to Whitehead, is a marriage of the two, which ensures the coordination between thought and action, which is regarded by all educationists as essential for the

development of an integrated personality. "There can be no adequate technical education which is not liberal" according to Whitehead, "and no liberal education which is not technical: that is no education which does not impart both technique and intellectual vision. In simpler language, education should turn out the pupil with something he knows well, and something he can do well. This intimate union of practice and theory aids both."

In trying to understand Nature, which has been the major objective of the scientists, he has also incidentally managed to obtain enormous control over nature, which naturally raises numerous pressing problems, which need a certain competence in science for tackling them.

Thus apart from the cultural value of scientific and technical education, it is becoming more and more a necessary equipment for every one, whether his career lies in science or in other fields.

It is significant, that while the scientist is keenly aware of the need for the humanizing influence of the other disciplines,—this awareness is by itself a certain mark of a liberal education—the humanities on the other side, do not seem to realize the important role which science has to play, in any scheme of education.

There is one other aspect of science to which I wish to refer before I conclude my address. Science, during the last few decades has taken such enormous strides that even its most ardent votaries find it impossible to keep pace with her. Many incredible

things are happening, which a few decades ago even those in the forefront of science would have regarded as definitely impossible. We have heard of facts being occasionally stranger than fiction. But even our wildest dreams become stale in the face of some of the new happenings. All that is just the beginning, and a preview of the new scientific world that is unfolding itself. There is ample promise that the new world that you will be entering into is going to be ever so much more exciting than we of an earlier generation can ever hope to see. I wish you all godspeed.

Jai Hind

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