

*UNIVERSITY OF MADRAS*

CONVOCATION ADDRESS

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by

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MR. CHANCELLOR, MR. PRO-CHANCELLOR,  
MR. VICE-CHANCELLOR, GRADUATES OF THE  
UNIVERSITY, AND FRIENDS.

I deem it a privilege to have been invited to deliver this year's Convocation Address at your University. Your University is one of the most senior Universities in India and has always held a place of pride in the academic world of the country. You have been fortunate in that you have had the benefit of the guidance of your eminent Vice-Chancellor Dr. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar for more than a quarter of a century. During this long and distinguished association between the veteran Vice-Chancellor and your ancient University, so many worthwhile developments have taken place and such a fascinating expansion of university activities has been witnessed, that I venture to think that both you and your Vice-Chancellor would be justified in deriving a sense of pride and satisfaction from this record of significant achievements. Before I begin my address, I would like to pay my tribute to Dr. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar, who is the doyen of the Vice-Chancellors in our country.

I have had occasions to deliver Convocation Addresses at several Universities and on each of such occasions I usually choose for my address a specific subject which would be of common interest to all sections of the academic community. The topic of my address to-day is: "University Education and National Integration".

Way back in 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru told the graduates of the Allahabad University that “a University stands for humanism, for tolerance, for reason, for progress, for the adventure of ideas and for the search of truth. It stands for the onward march of the human race towards even higher objectives. If the Universities discharge their duty adequately, then, it is well with the nation and the people.”

What is the role of university education today? The first and the primary function of university education obviously is to enable the students to reach peaks of excellence in the respective disciplines of their choice. During the last three quarters of a century the expansion of knowledge has assumed almost breathtaking dimensions and it must be the endeavour of every university to pursue the ideal of excellence in respect of the disciplines taught by its teachers. Pursuit of knowledge is, in a sense, the noblest of human pursuits. In this pursuit, teachers and students are partners, both dedicated to the search of truth. The university community consisting of the teachers and the students constitutes one brotherhood and the common bond which binds them together is the determination to seek knowledge, and dedication to the cause of search of truth. It is obvious that for such uninterrupted, ceaseless search of truth, the atmosphere in the university campus must always remain serene, peaceful and conducive to the exchange of thoughts and ideas. Students and teachers alike must, therefore, make a sustained effort to keep

the university campus free from the intrusion of any disturbing, subversive or narrow trends and tendencies.

A modern university can well be described in the words of Emerson, "as the eye which makes the horizon". Our university education must, therefore, be oriented to the task of creating a spirit of idealism which would help our students to make and mark the horizon of India's future. Dr. James, a famous educationist, once observed that "Universities are at once the catalysts and the creation of a changing society. Their destiny and dimensions in every nation will be as they always have been decided by and for the future." In the context of to-day, universities cannot live in an ivory tower. The university community must recognise that the quality of university education will ultimately be judged by the assistance it renders to the national effort to create a new social order. We, the members of the university community, must never forget that we are a part of a much bigger community and it is for the service of that bigger community that our education must prepare us. If university education remains isolated and aloof, and the university community does not participate in the stream of national life, it will have failed in its major and important function. The twin objective of university education, therefore, must be to enable the students to reach excellence in the different disciplines of their choice and to prepare them for their tasks of to-morrow when they begin to take active part in the affairs of our country.

This latter aspect of the function of university education must necessarily involve the participation of the teachers and the students in a continuous dialogue on all socio-economic problems which face the country. This dialogue should proceed on the basis that all participants are equal and it should not be inhibited by any fear of ideas or any subconscious partiality for any dogma or 'ism'. In life, there are no absolutes, and participants in such dialogues on the university campuses must recognise that there are many facets of truth and that socio-economic problems do not yield to a preconceived solution which is in the nature of a dogma. I would, therefore, appeal to the university community of Madras to recognise the significance of this twin objective of university education in the context of to-day and give a lead to the rest of India.

University education, as I have already said, is both the catalyst and the creation of a changing social order. With the expansion of knowledge and with the changing requirements of the development of the community in different spheres and departments, the form and content of education must inevitably change. That is how university education is the creation of a changing social order. University education has also to act as the catalyst of the changing social order by working as an instrument for converting the traditional Indian community into an open society, dynamic, forward-looking and progressive. To this noble task, the university community must dedicate itself. The problem of creating a new social order

presents many difficulties. The Indian community, by and large, is a traditional community, backward-looking, relying more upon tradition and scriptures, upon customs and beliefs, than upon reason and rational considerations. The task of converting this traditional community into a modern community has to be undertaken by the university community. We must come to terms with modernism and unless we adopt a modern approach, rational and scientific, the future of India would not be bright. This process involves education of the masses, and that is where university education and the university community have to play an important role.

The attempt to create a new social order immediately raises the question about national integration. It is an irony that 21 years after we became politically free and more than 18 years after we adopted the democratic way of life under the Constitution of India, national integration still remains unachieved. One should have thought that these two decades of freedom would have witnessed the translation of the concept of national integration into a reality. That, however, has unfortunately not happened and so all intellectuals must now commit themselves to the important task of making national integration a reality. In this significant process, we must all become emotionally and intellectually involved. Commitment to this ideal is, in my view, the most obvious requirement of to-day.

What are the basic postulates of the philosophy of national integration? The first and

essential basic postulate is that India is one country and the different regions governed by different State Governments are its constituent units. You may be aware that latterly some parties have been preaching the doctrine that India is a sub-continent and it consists of 16 different sub-nationalities. I would ask the university community to resist the spread of this doctrine. The whole scheme of the Constitution of India proceeds on the basic assumption that India is one country and that all of us who reside in different States must regard ourselves as Indians first, Indians second and Indians last. National integration, therefore, requires us to subscribe to this basic concept of the Indian Constitution.

I recognise that citizens living in different regions, speaking different languages, owing allegiance to different religions, owe a duty to their respective regions, religions and languages. I also realise that the State Governments are more directly in contact with the people of the region and are more directly and in a personal way involved in their social and economic betterment. Every one of us must, therefore, do his or her best to help the community around us and to assist the process of establishing socio-economic justice in each one's region. But if our horizon is restricted to our respective regions, and if we forget that our paramount loyalty must be to India, national integration would be in grave danger. It is unlikely that loyalty to the region would come in conflict with the loyalty to the country. If the problems of regional and national development are

tackled reasonably and in a scientific manner occasions for conflict between a region and the country would not arise. But if ever a conflict did arise between the regional loyalty and the national loyalty, I have no hesitation in saying that the regional loyalty must be subordinated to the national loyalty. I would like to remind you that Nehru once said: "There is an India; but where are the Indians?" That question has assumed grave poignancy to-day. Let us, therefore, make up our minds that we will, each one of us, in his or her own way, try to assist the development of the concept that India is one country and that citizens of India, wherever they reside, are Indians first, Indians second and Indians last. That is the first pre-requisite of national integration.

The second postulate of national integration is secularism. The word 'secular' does not occur in the Indian Constitution; but the concept of secularism permeates and inspires almost every important provision of the Constitution. It is essential to emphasise that Indian secularism is not anti-god or anti-religion. It recognises the relevance and importance of religion in human life. But it does not treat any religion as a State religion and allows all religions equal freedom and liberty to pursue their course. Hindus are in an overwhelmingly large majority in India; and yet Hinduism is not the religion of India. Let us be clear that in India there are not two classes of citizens. There is only one class of citizens, what ever be the religion they follow. Indian secular-



ism guarantees full freedom to religions, no doubt but it makes an important proviso to the said freedom and that is, that religious freedom must never trespass into the discussion or decision of purely secular matters. Whenever Indian democracy is attempting to solve the several socio-economic problems confronting it, no citizen will be allowed to introduce into the debate any religious consideration. Neither Manusmriti nor Koran, nor the Bible, nor any other religious text has any relevance in the regulation of the civil life of the country. In other words, so long as religions function within their legitimate spheres, Indian secularism is religiously neutral towards them.

Let me emphasise that Indian secularism is not a passive doctrine, nor is it entirely a political doctrine. It is a revolutionary doctrine which requires the citizens to recognise the basic fact that citizenship, fundamental rights flowing from it and obligations attaching to it, are secular matters and that when citizens discuss socio-economic questions, they are discussing secular, social and economic problems in which religion has nothing to do.

Secularism also requires a rational approach to the problem of castes amongst the Hindus. Secularism, which is a philosophy of rationalism, which is progressive, modern and scientific, refuses to recognise the validity of castes to-day. Castes and sub-castes which inevitably create narrower and diversive loyalties are, in my view, a major danger to the growth and acceptance of the

concept of national integration. It is a pity that ever since Indian democracy began its career in India, at the time of every election castes and sub-castes seem to play a major role either in the selection of candidates or in the formation of groups thereafter. Castes and caste loyalties are wholly inconsistent with Indian democracy as it is envisaged in the Indian Constitution. Secularism, therefore, requires that the university community should start a crusade against these castes and sub-castes and the narrow loyalties they develop in the minds of citizens.

Indian secularism also recognises that the practice of untouchability is entirely inconsistent with the notion of modernism. We are all aware that the Indian Constitution has, by Article 17, abolished untouchability and has provided that the enforcement of any disability arising out of untouchability shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law. Let us recognise the fact that social revolution cannot be brought about merely by the force of law. Law, no doubt, is a mighty weapon in the hands of a welfare democracy. But however mighty and majestic Law may be, it would be ineffective unless its implementation receives the whole-hearted and spontaneous co-operation of the public at large. We have abolished untouchability by law; but in life untouchability still persists and we do not seem to realise how frustrated and angry Harijans feel when they realise by actual experience that their lot has not substantially improved despite all the

tall provisions made in the respective laws of different States. Any talk about social equality sounds a sham when we realise that a substantial number of our own bretheren still suffer from this curse of untouchability. Recently, the Press reported several incidents in which Harijans have been ruthlessly treated as though they were not entitled to the rights and privileges of citizens in this country. Therefore, secularism requires that the educated community of the country should lend its strong support to the movement for the abolition of untouchability. Unless untouchability is completely abolished from our social life and unless caste loyalties are subordinated to the loyalty to the nation, all talk of national integration will have no meaning. I am quite clear in my mind that the removal of untouchability in actual life is the most essential requirement for establishing social equality in this country; and without establishing such social equality, national integration would be impossible.

Secularism also requires that all communities living in this country should live as brothers, as members of one Indian community. During the British rule, Hindu-Muslim riots were the order of the day. We then conveniently assumed that these riots were the result of the policy of divide and rule which the British rulers deliberately adopted. To some extent this explanation might have been true. But even after 20 years of freedom we find public life in India rudely disturbed by communal disharmony; and that is a very serious danger to the progress of Indian demo-

cracy and the development of the concept of national integration. The Hindu community, which is in a large majority in this country, must show a spirit of tolerance, understanding and patience in dealing with their Muslim brethren. Secularism does not involve appeasement. Secularism does not hesitate to warn the Muslim community that they have to be loyal to this country and must not harbour any thought which is inconsistent with patriotism. But secularism also requires that Hindus should not, day in and day out, suspect the loyalty of the Muslim community. If Hindu chauvinism attempts to take hold of youthful Hindu minds, its inevitable reaction would be the birth and growth of chauvinism amongst the young Muslim citizens. There are pockets of chauvinism both amongst the Hindus and the Muslims. Those of us who believe in secularism must resist the growth of chauvinism, whether it is in the Hindu mind or in the Muslim mind. Communal chauvinism is entirely destructive of the doctrine of secularism, and education alone is the powerful cure for this malady.

National integration also requires that the economic imbalance in the structure of the community as a whole has to be set right; and that is why the Constitution has promised to the citizens of India economic justice. Before political freedom was won, most of us entertained the superstitious belief that political freedom by itself was an end, and as soon as we became politically free, all our social and economic problems would

be automatically solved. Experience has belied that belief and we have now realised that political freedom is a means, though an important means for the solution of socio-economic problems and for achieving the task of creating a new social order. Indian democracy is committed to the establishment of an egalitarian society, and as such, for bringing about national integration, poverty, ignorance, disease, squalor and unemployment must be conquered. When we hear about disputes between different regions from time to time, part of the genesis of the said disputes is the economic imbalance between the respective regions. It must be conceded that the Legislatures in the States and at the Centre have made several efforts to solve the economic problems of the country; but, by and large, the poor, the hungry and the illiterate masses living in villages have not secured the right given to them by the Constitution to enjoy life, liberty and happiness. These millions of people living in villages are naturally feeling impatient; and if the democratic process is unable to solve their problems quick enough, they are likely to lose faith in democracy itself; and if the masses lose faith in democracy, the concept of national integrity and the nation's commitment to democracy and the rule of law will be in grave danger. Therefore, the university community must assist political power in finding adequate, satisfactory and rational solutions to the problem of poverty and unemployment. That is another aspect of the obligation of the university community to-day.

The problem of national language has been complicated by the introduction of political overtones and the consequence has been that the discussion of this problem is showing signs of disrupting this country. I do not propose to enter into that controversy to-day; I would merely like to reiterate that the consensus evolved at the recent Vice-Chancellors' Conference should be accepted by all the universities. The said consensus provides that efforts should be made systematically and in a planned and phased manner to introduce the regional language as the medium of university education up to the degree stage. But it must be remembered that this change over is intended to make education richer and better in quality, and not to make it cheaper for the purpose of passing. The time for the change over from the present English medium to the regional language may differ from university to university and indeed from discipline to discipline in the same university. In changing over, educationists would have to take into account the nature of the subject taught, the material for teaching available, and bear in mind all the other relevant and material considerations. At the post-graduate level and in all the national educational institutions, however, English will have to continue for a number of years. Indeed, even if Hindi receives acceptance as the national language in course of time, Hindi will take many, many years to attain the status of English and English always will have to be a link or an associate language meant for the communication of ideas

between members of the intellectual elite of this country *inter se* and with the intellectuals of the outside world.

In regard to universities situated in metropolitan cities, which have on their rolls large numbers of students speaking different languages, as well as in professional courses like law and medicine, and in national educational institutions which admit students from all over the country, the problem of medium has to be differently tackled. In these institutions and courses, English may have to continue for many years in the foreseeable future.

The problem of national language has been aggravated by the tone of impatience, militant and intolerant, which the advocates of Hindi adopt in attempting to secure the acceptance of Hindi as the national language by non-Hindi areas. I would earnestly suggest to all the political parties to leave the question of the national language aside for some time. If not this generation, the next generation may take it up and solve it rationally. Meanwhile, let us do our best to avoid dividing the country on this problem of language. Whether Hindi receives acceptance as the national language or not, English must always remain the main medium in post-graduate studies, and as such knowledge of English in depth would be essential even for under-graduate studies in most of the disciplines. I would, therefore, appeal to all the State Governments to go slow in the matter of introducing the regional language as the medium of instruction.

This problem takes me to the question of the autonomy of the universities. The Vice-Chancellors' Conference has decided that the question as to how, when and in what stages the regional languages should be introduced as the medium of instruction at the under-graduate stage should be left to the universities alone and should not be made a political issue to be debated in the legislative chambers. In other words, the centre of gravity must shift to the university from the Secretariat and autonomy of the universities must be fully recognised. When I speak of the autonomy of the universities, I do not mean that the universities claim the status of a State within a State. I recognise that the State Legislatures are competent to deal with the question of education, including higher education, subject to the limitations prescribed by the relevant entries in Schedule 1. In that sense, the State Legislatures can make laws about the constitution of the universities and may, if they so desire, even prescribe details about the functioning of the universities. The sovereignty of the Legislature to deal with higher education is not disputed by those who advocate the autonomy of the universities. What is suggested is that in academic matters, political power should leave the academics full freedom to deal with them on the merits. In other words, the claim for autonomy of the universities amounts to a suggestion that political power should not interfere in the academic matters of the universities and should leave the universities to administer their affairs, uninterrupted by any external pull or pressure. If the



question about the medium of instruction is left to the universities, I venture to hope that all the universities, in course of time, will solve the problem satisfactorily without doing harm to the quality of education and without disturbing the growth and development of the concept of national integration.

The autonomy of the university also means that the executive organs of the university should not impinge upon the free and fearless functioning of its Faculties. Teachers who constitute the Faculties should be left free to decide all academic questions and the executive organs in which non-academic sections are represented should refrain from interfering with the free functioning of the Faculties. The executive organs must remember that universities are not a factory or a mill. They are institutions devoted to the search of truth and to the pursuit of excellence in knowledge and all problems pertaining to the said search and the said pursuit must be left to the decision of the academics.

University autonomy also means that amongst the teachers themselves there must be no question of superior or inferior. Just as I am emphasising the fact that the executive organs of the university should not interfere with the Faculties of the university, I wish to emphasise with all the earnestness I can command that the senior teachers must give full liberty and freedom to the junior teachers to express themselves in all academic matters before questions of policy are decided.

The concept of brotherhood, to which I have already referred, postulates that all the members of the brotherhood are absolutely equal and this brotherhood includes not only the teachers, but the students as well. This inevitably means that the students of the university must be given a chance to participate in some of the activities of the university. In all extra-curricular activities of university, the students should be given a dominant voice and slowly and by stages students' representatives, properly selected, should also be associated in the discussion and decision of of academic matters. But naturally this process has to be slow and cautious, and its success will depend upon the quality and calibre of the equipment of the student community.

Lastly, the autonomy of the university postulates that in their search for truth and in the expression of the conclusions they reach, the members of the Faculties and the students should be unafraid of popular prejudices. It is likely that some conclusions which the academics reach might be distasteful to the public mind. But fear of public criticism must not deter the academics from expressing their views openly, clearly and unambiguously. If the universities function in the light of this broad and comprehensive concept of their autonomy, I have no manner of doubt that they will assist the nation in its onward march towards the attainment of the ideal of national integration.

Before I proceed any further, I would incidentally refer to the problem of the language of the High Courts and the Supreme Court. I hope, the Union Government will not encourage any State to adopt the regional language as the language of the High Court. If regional languages become the languages of the High Courts, and the Supreme Court begins to function in Hindi, it will create several complicated problems which might, I fear, in the end sow the seeds of disintegration of the country.

There is only one more point I would like to emphasise before I conclude. The concept of national integration, like the concept of social equality and economic justice, has to become a reality in our individual and collective life by a democratic process under the rule of law. Indian democracy is committed to the establishment of social equality and economic justice, and it is committed to the rule of law. Violence must, therefore, be completely eschewed and must be regarded as irrelevant in the pursuit of our ideals. It is true that the violence sometimes erupts because citizens get a feeling that unless the redress for any grievance is sought for by violent methods, Governments either in the States or at the Centre do not give them a serious thought. If the rule of law has to prevail, all Governments in the country must scrupulously avoid creating an impression either by their action or inaction that it is violence alone that moves them to solve problems. But the public at large must be taught that eruption of violence is totally inconsistent with

the rule of law, and in that sense is destructive of the concept of national integration based on the rule of law. If violence erupts frequently in different parts of the country, the rule of the law comes to an end and the whole fabric of the democratic way of life built by the Constitution is exposed to grave jeopardy. Thus the concept of integration rests on these solid democratic postulates and in this hour of trial, when the Indian democracy is passing through a difficult stage, it is the duty of the university community to assist the nation in achieving its objective of national integration in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.

I have always felt that the university community can discharge this function effectively if a comprehensive University Movement is inaugurated and fostered by all the universities in our country. The University Movement will seek to make the university community fully conscious of its obligations to the nation as a whole and will consolidate academic opinion in respect of the major issues which we are facing to-day. A modest but earnest endeavour was made to initiate such a University Movement by the Bombay University in co-operation with the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in May last. We had organised an All India University Teachers' and Students' Camp and invited all the Indian universities to join the Camp; and 58 universities responded to our appeal. The Camp lasted for six days, and for all those who participated in it, it was a heartwarming and exhilarating experience. I would appeal to the

Madras University to strengthen the idea of the University Movement which has been initiated by the said Camp.

I have been speaking about national integration in my own imperfect, inadequate words so long. I would, therefore, prefer to conclude my speech with the inspiring words of the great Tamilian poet Subrahmanya Bharati. Says the poet :

This is the hour  
of Song and Dance  
For blissful freedom  
Is ours at last.  
We've learnt that this is our own land,  
It will for ever be ours ;  
No nation shall enslave us again ;  
We'll prosper serving God, our sole Lord.  
We are of the same caste and race,  
We are children of Bharat all ;  
We are equal in law and stature,  
And every one is Bharat's King.

May the University of Madras play a leading role in giving a lead to the university community of India to march in unison to attain this goal of national integration.

