

## **5.6 Amravati University**

*Convocation Address*

**Hon'ble Chancellor,  
Distinguished Vice-Chancellor,  
Members of the University Authorities,  
Members of the Faculty and Staff of the University,  
Graduates of the Year,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

1. Let me express my deep sense of gratitude to the authorities of the university and particularly to the Vice-Chancellor, for giving me the privilege of delivering the Convocation Address of the fourteenth convocation ceremony of Amravati University.

I am not new to this university. I have visited the university on many occasions right from its establishment in the year 1983, and observed its growth. During the last fifteen years, which is a very small period in the life of a university, Amravati University has grown by leaps and bounds. The University now has a well-developed and beautiful campus with 22 postgraduate departments, mostly in applied fields of science and technology, 181 affiliated colleges and a large number of students. The growth is truly remarkable.

This part of Maharashtra, the Vidarbha, inherits great cultural and educational traditions. This is the birthplace of Matoshri Jijamata, religious centre of the '*Mahanubhav Panth*' and the place of saints like Loksant Shri Gadgebaba, Rastrasant Shri Tukdoji Maharaj and the visionary Gulabrao Maharaj. An eminent educationist of the region, Dr. Panjabrao alias Bhausaheb Deshmukh has started pioneering work in spreading education in the region which has led to the creation of Amravati University. I am an admirer of Dr. Panjabrao Deshmukh for his far-sighted vision of education for the masses. He conceived the idea of a peoples' university, the '*Lok-Vidyapith*', had inaugurated it in 1948 by the President of India and had the courage to establish an educational institution for offering non-traditional educational programmes relevant to the work and life situations of common people. The University, therefore, inherits the great traditions of saints, social reformers, and educationists who were always concerned with the well-being of common persons, their development and progress. It is evident from the range of departments and activities that the university has responded quite well to the traditional, modern and social needs of the people of Vidarbha, and within a short period, acquired an enviable reputation and recognition from peers. I congratulate the faculty, the staff, and the Vice-Chancellor for their commitment and achievements and wish them all success.

2. While responding to the aspirations and needs, felt as well as perceived, one can notice the concern this university has to acquire more physical facilities, the need to recruit eminent scholars and experienced teachers, and to equip buildings with the latest

appliances and instruments for offering higher quality education to its students from this region. The demand from students and parents to acquire a seat for a course of study, particularly in professional and technology programmes, is growing enormously. This is, no doubt, a widespread phenomenon and the concern of every university is for more • students, more buildings and facilities, more teachers; more and bigger campuses and more colleges.

3. The nation has adopted a policy of universalization of primary education. It will be, I am sure, followed by the universalization of secondary education, which will be the minimum education that needs to be imparted to every young man and woman to be able to live and work in modern world. This will obviously increase pressure on university education; and a view is fast emerging, that in a technological progressive and fast developing society, every learner who desires to learn should be given access to education. Education, including higher education, is becoming the right of every citizen, particularly in the coming century. It is, therefore, obvious that the demand for such a widespread education cannot be fulfilled by the conventional and traditional approaches of establishing more colleges and universities. More of the same is not the way out.

### **Changing Scenario**

4. All of us are aware that a great information communication revolution is sweeping the world. It is changing the modes and speed of communication and making the world a small global village. The communication technologies are transforming the existing industrial society into an information society. The transition has already started and is expected to be at maturation level within the next few decades. The process of globalization and liberalization has already set in and existing educational institutions are likely to undergo radical transformations appropriate for society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
5. Indian education had a glorious past as reflected by its universities like Nalanda and Takshashila and the Gurukul system which was appropriate for an agrarian and feudal society. India missed the Industrial Revolution and suffered a long period of colonization. The present Indian system of education was shaped and developed by the colonial masters mainly to serve their imperial interests, The hallmark of education in industrial society is a '*Classroom*' in a college or university. The faculty of the college or university, depending on their specialization and expertise and institutions' facilities are imparting education through degree and diploma programmes. This is a typical institution suitable to industrial society! Through liberal education in the modern university system came these western models of educational institutions, the linkage of education with development and the processes of social, industrial and economic transformation was not well established. This process started in India essentially after independence.

During the last 50 years of independence, India has widened access to higher education quite extensively. The form of education developed was the typical institutionalised teacher- centric system, considered relevant to industrial society. The expansion of education in India without ensuring its relevance to social and developmental needs created many anomalies and irrelevances in the system of education. India with the rest

of humanity are now at the stage of changing over to an information-focussed society. Many institutions, organizations and agencies in the country are employing communication technologies in a big way. Computer literacy and applications are spreading fast, particularly among the younger generation. E-mail, Internet, and other network access is becoming widespread. The institutional forms and structures, the ways of living and working are all slowly changing under the impact of these processes of globalisation. The Indian university system therefore faces the challenge of defining its vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, capable of fulfilling the needs and requirements of the Indian people in transition from the existing semi-agrarian and industrial society to such an information based society.

6. Education is getting top priority in the planning and development of every country. Mr. Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister described that "*...three priorities for (his) Government would be education, education and education.* " It must be based on wider access to higher education and continual opportunities for all adults to learn throughout life. Mr. Bill Clinton, the President of United States of America *remarked* "*...education will be every citizen's most prized possession. Our schools will have the highest standards in the world, igniting the spark of possibility in the eyes of every girl and boy. And the doors of higher education will be open to all. The knowledge and power of the information age will be within reach not just of the few, but of every classroom, every library and every child.*"
7. Universities in the developed countries have embarked on aggressive marketing of their products of education and are searching markets for their programmes particularly in the developing countries. The Universities in UK, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and USA are making twinning arrangements with many partner institutions - the universities, colleges and other organizations etc. - to offer their courses to local students in African and Asian Countries. They are using communication technologies in education quite extensively. UK in its far- sighted and largest programme of its kind, has centrally funded 76 projects worth 75 million pounds, located within higher education institutions in the UK for developing teaching and learning technology programmes by employing communication technologies. The aim is to offer the courses in various faculties on electronic media to the learners in their own country and abroad. Higher education institutions in West and Central Scotland have planned Clyde Virtual University as a collaborative venture of six leading universities and institutions. The African '*Virtual*' University (AVU): is promoted and heavily subsidised by the World Bank, and is expected to bring state-of-the-art knowledge, available in North America and Western Europe, to a number of campuses across Africa. Malaysia has planned a virtual university called University International Tun Abdul Razak (UNITAR) which is scheduled to go on line in May 1999. The Western Governors '*Virtual*' University (WGU): supported by the Governors of 15 states and one territory, is being set up to expand post- secondary education for the widely dispersed residents of the 16 jurisdictions in the USA. It hopes to register its first students later this year and will deliver competency-based degree level courses via the internet. The National Technological University (NTU): acts as a bridge between remote learners and participating institutions (faculty) in postgraduate engineering studies, arranging one-way transmission of lectures (in synchronous and

more lately in asynchronous mode) with two or multiple ways of teacher-learner-learner computer-based communication. It enables the movement of credits and also grants its own awards. UKOU has recently signed an MoU with Electronic Data Interchange Company from Malaysia to offer its courses on electronic media directly to students in Malaysia. All these efforts are directed at providing global access to the programmes of these universities. Many universities and their consortia from developed countries have already established their partners in India and are offering their courses to Indian students. Global competition has already come to India and now poses a serious challenge before Indian Universities.

8. The education system in India simultaneously faces the challenge at home of widening access to larger numbers, particularly the disadvantaged groups, ensuring relevance of its programmes to the needs and requirements of the fast changing society, offering quality education of high standard that can compare and compete with those from the developed countries, and ensuring equity and social justice in the provision of educational opportunities. The numbers involved are in tens of millions and hence cost-effectiveness and efficiency need to be achieved. The modern communication technologies provide excellent opportunities for extending the outreach of education by ensuring its quality. Though the initial costs are high, with larger numbers accessed, the unit cost will be low.

### **Open Universities Network**

9. Many institutions, mostly private, are venturing into the field of education and are offering professional and technological courses by using communication technologies, prominent among these in India being NIIT, APTECH and Zee Education. They are using television, computer communication, e-mail and networks - The internet for reaching their students. Their enrolment is rising, geographical coverage increasing and they also have centres abroad. I have the honour and privilege of leading the national institution - Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), which, as an apex body for open and distance education, is engaged in the task of developing a network of Open Universities in India called OPENET {Open Education Network}.

OPENET is a network of physical, intellectual and academic resources organised under the aegis of the Distance Education Council (DEC), an independent arm of IGNOU that deals with the coordination and promotion of open and distance education in India. All the open universities are partners in the OPENET. The resources that are pooled together include academic programmes, norms for sharing the programmes, delivery mechanisms and interactive software for student services etc. The OPENET will be an umbrella network with subnets of every partner university for the delivery of their own courses. All will use the common national backbone and have the freedom and facility to develop and extend their own outreach to education for their own students. DEC of IGNOU will promote and coordinate the programme of enriching the common pool of resources, and help in raising the quality of academic offerings and interaction. This is a collaborative endeavour for sharing and working together for offering wider access and better quality education to students.

10. The national backbone of OPENET consists of a hub with network management system at the Headquarters of IGNOU at Delhi and uses an extended C-band transponder offered by ISRO. Its imprint is all over India. The present teleconferencing facility used by IGNOU is based on analog technology and allows only interactive television with one-way video and two-way audio communication by using telephone lines. The OPENET will be using for its national backbone and network of VSATs, the modern digital and compression technology consistent with the standards adopted by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT). IGNOU proposes to cover 220 different district locations in the next two years to have direct communications with students and counsellors at study centres. At the study centre located preferably at a district town, VSAT will be installed which enables one-way video and two-way audio, and the other study centres of IGNOU or the State Open University in the same town or district will have a VSAT each which can receive video, audio and data, but back communication will be through local telephone lines reducing communication costs substantially. The reception received from the hub at the study centre can be linked through cable TV and telephone lines, to home or work-places. Any two VSATs can also communicate with each other. Thus the network of hub and VSATs extends access to the physical, intellectual and academic resources stored in the network at various resource centres of the university to large numbers of learners. Besides IGNOU's OPENET, every state open university is encouraged to have its own hub and VSATs located at different places in the state and can have its own state network as well - a subnet of OPENET. The Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU) has proposed its state OPENET with a hub at Nashik and VSATs of different types to cover about 80 locations in Maharashtra. The network will cost around Rs. 4.00 crores and will receive a part support from DEC. The other state open universities are also trying to set up their own state OPENET. The investment is one-time, and will create communication highways and dedicated intranet for institutional communication for offering training and education.
11. Education needs interactivity of the highest quality and intimacy between learners and learning resources. The learning resources include, among others, teachers, experts, knowledge media and materials. Higher interactivity, coming closer to face-to-face situations, will ensure superior processes of educating and learning. Rapid development in communication technologies is progressively reducing the distance in open and distance education. OPENET is, therefore, trying to acquire state-of-the art technology for education.
12. **The OPENET will allow essentially two types of interactivities:**

1. Distributed or virtual classroom, and
2. Computer communication

The distributed classroom could again be of two types : The first one is the Interactive TV (ITV) classroom with the presentation end at the hub linked with distributed learning ends through VSATs, which could be a classroom or home or work-place. The second type is a server-based classroom in which teachers and students can have a link with the server on which teaching and learning resources such as educational programmes and

services are stored. Both the classrooms can work in a synchronous or asynchronous mode. Besides, teachers and students can communicate amongst themselves through computer connectivity by using e-mail with audio, video or print exchange.

13. Indian Open and Distance Education System is going through generations of changes. It started with correspondence course education, moved to distance education, then to open education and now it is getting transformed into the Networked System of Education. The next few years should visualise the development and expansion of OPENET by extending its access and outreach. We hope that OPENET will be able to serve, by 2002 A.D, a target of 20 lakh degree and diploma students and 100-150 million continuing education learners through short-term training and education modules. Our ultimate goal is to develop the OPENET in the form of a Knowledge Network, as an appropriate instrument for the future learning society of twenty-first century, to facilitate lifelong learning and to ensure seamless, continuing education for all.

### **Collaborative Networking**

14. Educational institutions, here as well as abroad, have been compelled to become partners for networking and collaboratively sharing and using available resources for many reasons. Processes of modernization, globalization and liberalization are forcing institutions to increasingly use communication technologies. Distances are becoming meaningless, (death of a distance) jurisdictions are widening and becoming global. Besides these, some of the specific reasons are :

- **High cost : The capital investment** needed for acquiring hardware, interactive software and development of courseware or multimedia for network use is quite high. Shared use of the facilities therefore reduces the cost substantially.
- **Scarce expertise** : Demand for newer and appropriate professional and technological courses of high quality need expertise of high quality, rarely available adequately with one institution.
- **Reduced funding** to higher education
- **Changing nature and demand of learners** : Learners in higher age groups and working people are in need of short-term, flexible and modular learning required to fulfil their immediate needs. Their numbers and need are very large, and diverse.
- **Changing Course contents** : Due to explosion of knowledge and its fast adoption in various life and work situations, rapid changes in course contents are now inevitable. The work places are increasing employing newer and higher technologies and techniques.

All these factors have led to the concepts of partnerships, consortia and cooperatives. Further, the modern communication technologies are making working from a distance quite feasible, economical and convenient. This is, therefore, giving rise to newer forms of institutions and organization - the virtual universities and institutions are some examples. They rely on wires and webs rather than brick and mortar. There are many sceptics who believe that 'real' learning will not take place in such institutions. However, we know that learning takes place at many places - homes, at workplaces and in the community. It needs backup of knowledge and experiences, which could be provided by the Knowledge Network.

15. Use of CT and networking the institutions will be developing what we call the networked education system. As mentioned earlier, many developed as well as developing countries are starting cooperative endeavours of virtual universities depending on their need, preparedness and access to technologies. Internet is becoming the highway for communication. However, its cost, access and personalised use are still quite inaccessible to many in India and may take quite a few years before it becomes available to many. The OPENET uses both the computer communication with access to Internet, and also interactive television creating familiar classroom environment. The distributed classroom can be extended to homes through Cable TV without requiring computers at home. The communication Technology scenario in India is changing quite fast. However, use of the CT's and networking for developing academic services and programmes, for training and educating is going to be an arduous and long-term task and needs participation from all experts and teachers.

16. Networked education will be developing a new paradigm of education appropriate to the 21<sup>st</sup> century society. It will transform education quite radically. Changes will occur :

**From**

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| • Teaching                                       | To Learning   |
| • Teacher/Institution prescribed courses         | To Learner demanded   |
| • Synchronous teaching-learning Process separate | To Asynchronous and teaching/tele-teaching and learning process             |
| • On-Campus ' <b>Classroom</b> ' education       | To Home, workplace and community based Education                            |
| • Single Institution                             | To Consortia of institutions networked together by electronic communication |
| • Traditional students                           | To Non-traditional students   |

And promoting symbiotic learning the new paradigm will be a working relationship leading to the learning society of the information age.

17. Prof. Gajaraj Dhanarajan, the President of Commonwealth of Learning, in his inaugural address recently delivered in the International Conference on "Networked & Collaborative Learning" envisioned: *"The 21<sup>st</sup> century will witness, I am certain, the emergence of a number of pan-global open learning systems. They need not be funded*

*by the public purse, but by entrepreneurs who will work in partnerships either with like-minded individuals or with public-funded institutions that will not place impediments against the movement of students, courses, learning materials, credits and staff'. The COL is itself promoting an international programme called Commonwealth Executive MBA and MPA in collaboration and partnership with open universities and institutions in South Asia soon. IGNOU and open universities from Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are as well the 'partners', besides some others in the development and delivery of the programme.*

18. Partnerships and consortia are being formed at the international level by making adjustments to parochial interests and new management's are getting more focussed on outcomes and less on peripherals. OPENET is trying to evolve a way of partnership at the national level. It is high time that the universities in India, particularly at the state level with distinct language and regional needs should develop a consortium approach for developing new mechanisms, a virtual university in which all universities in a state can join hands to develop broad-based inclusive programmes for various training and educational situations, to offer them individually and collectively and to allow the learners to have wider choice of courses, with high quality, variety, diversity and relevance. By pooling resources and expertise, the universities can create courseware that can match national and international standards and can have not only local but even international markets and customers. This is the challenge of the new scenario and the way towards the information society, Because India could not catch the industrial revolution a few centuries back it had to suffer colonial rule for one and a half centuries. We should not now miss the information revolution' otherwise cultural colonization will be inevitable.

Dear graduates, the World you are entering into is one of lifelong, seamless learning. I am sure the knowledge, values and practices you have acquired here in this university will stand you in good stead in making your life productive, richer and happier. I wish you all the best for a successful and productive career.