

The Greatest Wealth of All

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(Salutations)

It gives me a great thrill to be back at my alma mater, the university where the alchemy of life was made evident to me for the first time. But before I proceed further, let me congratulate all of you students most heartily for having completed your studies here and earned your degrees through diligence, determination and dedication. I am particularly happy to see the large numbers of women students here today. You are a source of pride and inspiration to our sisters all over India. I remember the convocation ceremony where I earned my degree of Master of Arts in English Literature too. Those were the days when it was bliss to be young and alive. It seemed as if the world was at my feet and I could conquer it at any time! I am sure you feel the same way. By the way, just as with all of you, when I was 21 years old becoming old was something I dismissed out of hand. I used to joke, as President Barack Obama once said, about being old. Now I realize I'm old. It's not a joke anymore! But jokes apart, today, as then, a college degree is the price of admission to the world economy, a ticket that gives you a seat at the table, that enables you to compete in the marketplace. So, my congratulations to all of you once again!

Aurangabad was a small city in 1970 when I first arrived here but within its confines, I met a plurality of people so different from those I had seen before. My fellow-students were drawn from the Marathwada, from towns like Beed, Parbhani, Jalna and Nanded, besides Aurangabad, from the soil of the ancient Deccan. This was a brave new world. My fragile and superficial veneer of assumed cosmopolitanism had no room to survive here. Adjust or perish, or at least feel the pulse of your young country, became the message that guided my path in the years I spent here. Here was history, a peninsular history of Buddhist glory and devotion as visualized on the painted walls of the ageless cave formations of Ajanta, and the effortlessly sublime, towering presence of the temple of Kailash at Ellora. Here one heard of the ill-fated odyssey of a disoriented Muhammad Bin Tughlaq and his capital Daulatabad, whose every stone spoke of imperial hubris, the fascinating saga of the intrepid Ethiopian Malik Amber who conceived the underground waterways of this city, poet saints like Dnyaneshwar, and the hovering presence of a complex emperor, encapsulating vaulting ambition and religious austerity both in their extremes, Aurangzeb Alamgir, the ornament of the throne who has seized the universe, as his name spells out. For a young girl who loved history, I had come home. A cavalcade of pilgrims, saints, sculptors, painters and masons, Sassanid merchants, Central Asian horsemen, Mughal courtiers, Rajput generals, Sikh gurus and Maratha heroes, who all seemed to speak to me, wherever I looked. I had seen nothing of the kind before. The amalgamation of influences I saw, stretching from the Rashtrakutas to Hindu Vijayanagar to the Turkic-Iranian world to the Mughals, was arresting. It was like being treated to a display of never-ending fireworks in a night sky. And to top it all, this University enabled me to learn from Professors who were outstanding teachers and founts of learning par

excellence/: Dr Amur, Dr Yardi, Dr Prasad. Their erudition and wisdom were unparalleled.

It did not end there. Aurangabad was a crucible of modern India, too, witness to its current history, and its people were players in this epic story. The city had been a part of the Nizam's dominions and had seen turbulence and police action in the years after independence, as the absorption of princely India into the newly independent Union took place. Subsequently, it became a part of the new state of Maharashtra in 1960. Through all this, it retained its intrinsic identity as a source of much of the grandeur, glory and the beauty that is India's Deccan.

The Deccan of which Aurangabad is a geographical constituent is a formation almost as old as our planet itself, a repository of the earth's mystery and secrets, whose rock formations are among the most spectacular in the world. Deccan, Dakkin or Dakshin is the high ground of Peninsular India, washed by the sea and ocean on three sides, a ground zero of cross-cultural encounters between Islamic and Hindu mysticism, of Sultans like Ibrahim Adil Shah the Second, who was devoted to Saraswati, the goddess of learning, and of Yoginis dressed in robes of a Muslim court but following the Hindu God Shiva. The muffled footsteps of those histories, still echo in our ears as we contemplate the golden skies, the fantastical gorges, sheer rock faces, and the volcanic soils of the Deccan. It is little wonder that today, the heritage of the region is celebrated far and wide, as the recently concluded exhibition "Sultans of Deccan India, 1500-1700 Opulence and Fantasy" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, demonstrated eloquently and expressively and which placed, as a reviewer noted, the region on the global and pan-Indic map by virtue of its sheer inclusivity and absorbent genius. The Deccan has moved from the margins to the mainstream of Indian history today as a result of this intense scholarly focus and interest. And here we cannot forget the legacy and the contribution of the late, respected Dr. Ramesh Shankar Gupte who headed the Department of History here in this University during my college days and whose work on the heritage of this ancient region is greatly respected and remembered.

The story goes on. Let us return to Aurangabad, keeper of the keys to the Deccan for just as Hyderabad in Telengana is the guardian of the southeastern heartland of the plateau, so too, our city, Aurangabad is at its northwestern gateway. Indeed, Aurangabad is the city of gates, 52 of them as I understand, although many of them are no longer intact. The immortal imprint of the Buddha, savior of humanity, was made even more meaningful through the legacy of one of the greatest Indians in India's history: Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. Even before the establishment of our university in 1958, Dr. Ambedkar, had established the Milind College under the auspices of the People's Education Society in 1950-51, supervising its conception and establishment. The name Milind was chosen carefully, venerating the memory of the intelligent and wise Bactrian Greek king Menander or Milind whose brilliant debates with the sage Nagasena are enshrined in the Buddhist scriptures. During his visits to Aurangabad it is said that Dr. Ambedkar used to stay in a small room of the college building. He visited the city

frequently to address the staff and students of the college with words full of knowledge, information and encouragement. He stressed often that a person should remain a student throughout his or her life. He was a lifelong learner, with a deep and unquenchable thirst for knowledge and for reading. "What instructs me" he once observed, "amuses me."

But before everything, Dr. Ambedkar was a key Founding Father of our Republic, the leading architect of the Constitution that we, India that is Bharat, are blessed to possess as a Charter for our rights and responsibilities as citizens. Babasaheb has been likened by some to Moses, because he catalogued and interpreted the code of the laws of a nation. His vision of good governance stressed that power and the exercise of it, especially when it came to governing a country as large and diverse as India, be tempered by wisdom and non-discrimination especially where minorities and those cruelly marginalized by centuries of social exclusion and inequality were concerned.

Of crucial emphasis also was the importance he gave to education. It was his considered view that education had a vital role in moralizing and socializing the individual, in developing a cognizance of self. Likewise, was his passionate support of a uniform civil code throughout the length and breadth of India. As for religion, his belief, as a champion of true democracy and freedom, was that the best religion was that which taught liberty, equality and fraternity. His vision of India was of a country that went beyond dogmas, whether political or religious. His dream was the safeguarding of human dignity and human rights for all, and of social justice and equality for every man, woman and child. His was the vision of a Humanist India, or what in his words was "Prabuddha Bharat". The concept of equality to him was an article of faith, imprinted on his heart and soul. He also wanted the sovereignty of scriptures of all religions to come to an end in order to have a united, integrated modern India.

It was the Buddha, who about two and a half millennia ago questioned the caste divisions in Indian society. He drew a distinction between those who are noble and wholesome and those who are ignoble and unwholesome. It was Avvai, the Tamil poetess who said that it is the charitable who give who are superior, and the misers who do not who are, therefore, inferior.

Dr. Ambedkar's understanding of the Buddha was more than just focused on the doctrine of Ahimsa. In his classic lecture on The Buddha and Marx delivered in Kathmandu, he outlined the creed of the Buddha. That worth and not birth is the measure of the man. That Maitri or fellowship towards all must never be abandoned. One owes it even to one's enemy. That everyone has a right to learn but that learning without character is dangerous. That the most important of the most important was that in producing equality, society cannot afford to sacrifice fraternity or liberty. The three could coexist if one followed the way of the Buddha. The Russian Revolution, a Communist movement, produced equality but it sacrificed fraternity or liberty. Buddhism, two thousand years

before Marx, encapsulated all the three and therefore demonstrated its sanctity and essential superiority.

Here we are in India of the 21st century. India enjoys a demographic dividend. According to the United Nations Population Fund, India has the world's highest number of young people, with 356 million 10 to 24 year-olds. The employment rate of these youth must rise and rise further because otherwise, unemployment has the tendency to turn the dividend into a youth bulge, often a trigger for unstable social conditions. In the Union Budget 2017 to 2018 the Government announced several cross-sectoral measures for enhancing employability and job creation among the population. One of them is the "Energising Youth through Education, Skills and Jobs" in order to address the aspirations of young India. Special focus has been laid on the labour intensive sectors for generating employment opportunities including textiles, leather and footwear and electronics manufacturing.

It is understood that authoritative data on employment and unemployment is available only up to March 2011 and that too only in the organized sector, which employs about 29 million people out of the estimated total workforce of around 480 million. The participation rate is obviously very low. Unemployment must be efficiently targeted among the group aged 15-17 years and 18-29 years. The problem is also about efficient economic data collection, statistical analysis and dissemination that can contribute to better governance and create a transformational impact. Policy must be made with "timely data and facts rather than based on ideology and polemics" as a leading newspaper noted recently. When Angus Deaton won the 2015 Nobel Prize for Economics, he said that democracies required good data. Can we say more? The crux of the matter is that while our youth should not lose the capacity to dream, it cannot be denied that they need well paying jobs and that authentic, scientifically-marshalled data is vital in order to meet this challenge of job creation effectively!

Nevertheless, there is great hope for India on the horizon. We see it around us in terms of the acceleration of economic growth that makes India the fastest growing big economy. This in itself, coupled with a lower rate of population growth is going to increase per capita incomes at a much faster rate than happened in my generation. As economists point out, structural change happens when incomes rise. Consumption patterns change, people's tastes change and you are going to reap also the benefits of newer and newer technologies that are more powerful than any we have seen before. There will be many opportunities for entrepreneurship and to showcase your talents.

All of you in the audience today are educated, knowledgeable, trained and skilled, and should have the definite opportunity therefore to build the India of your dreams. In this context, I would urge you to open your minds and thoughts to what has been achieved in countries like Singapore and China – especially in the latter in terms of scale and size of infrastructure projects and public facilities. The Chinese have a story about the

“foolish” old man of 90 who moved mountains, because of the obstruction they caused, and dug through them with hoes and baskets. In India, we have the story of Dashrat Manjhi who cut down a mountain single-handed for 22 years day in and out. Closer home, we see the grandeur of the man-made caves of Ajanta, the temple of Kailash, all carved from hard rock by the persistence and determination of fellow human beings from a bygone era. These stories connote the importance of perseverance as a human virtue when one wishes to achieve what the rest of society terms impossible to achieve. That ability to move mountains therefore, to carve temples and caves out of the hardest rock, in order to achieve your goals is what you must always incubate within yourselves. It is only strength of determination, capacity for out-of-the-box thinking, faith and conviction about your abilities, that enables you to win the world. India must learn to think big, and execute, implement these big thoughts. Too much time has been expended in talk and endless conversations.

That brings me back to the juncture at which your lives are at the moment. You are on the threshold of what I hope will be beautiful tomorrows for each and every one of you. You have been through the hallowed portals of this University, which is also my Alma Mater, in pursuit of your education. In this quest, during all the lectures you have heard from your professors, I hope your minds have gone more than half-way to meet what came to you from the four corners of this house of learning. That was what Cardinal Newman said more than a century and a half ago when he spoke of the idea of a University. Let me quote:

“For why do we educate, except to prepare for the world? Why do we cultivate the intellect of the many beyond the first elements of knowledge, except for this world? Will it be much matter in the world to come whether our bodily health or our intellectual strength was more or less, except of course as this world is in all its circumstances a trial for the next? If then a University is a direct preparation for this world, let it be what it professes. It is not a Convent, it is not a Seminary; it is a place to fit men of the world for the world. We cannot possibly keep them from plunging into the world, with all its ways and principles and maxims, when their time comes; but we can prepare them against what is inevitable; and it is not the way to learn to swim in troubled waters, never to have gone into them“.

If I ask you what your aspirations for the world are, I am sure you will echo millions of other young people to say you want to feel safe, settled and happy, Prosperity and security reinforce each other – prosperity and security that come from economic progress, from innovation, enterprise and technological invention. There is a backlash against globalization it is true, there is a rise of populism, nativism and nationalism but who will deny that everybody wants to better their lives, everybody, as a popular English song goes, wants a ticket to ride. Whatever the downsides of globalization may be, what is the harm in developing a global vision on the lines of what Gandhiji once said? I quote: “Once we recognize the common parent stock from which we are sprung, we realize the basic unity of the human family, and there is no room left for enmities and

unhealthy competition." The cross-pollination of minds, ideas, the freedom of debate, the jousting of ideas - that should be our goal. Let your lives be lived in what has been rightly called, the Open University of Human Experience, with its rich curriculum. Coming as we do from India, we see the whole world as an extended family. "Vasuthaiva Kutumbakam", our DNA, our diverse inheritance, is committed, laser-like, to peace, inclusiveness and forbearance, as our foreign policy is reflective of.

Sree Aurobindo, that great son of India, saw national education as constituting more than the acquisition of a degree or time spent in school and college. He said national education is "something more profound, great and searching.. an education proper to an Indian soul and need and temperament and culture that we are in quest of ..something faithful (not) merely to the past, but to the developing soul of India, to her future need, to the greatness of her coming self-creation, to her eternal spirit". The question, as Sree Aurobindo framed it, is not between modernism and antiquity but between the present and the future, not a return to the glories of the fifth century but "an initiation of centuries to come" that is demanded "by the soul, by the Shakti of India". And this is where we see the expounding of a universalist vision: that education must help the student to enter into that perfect relationship with the mind and soul of the larger humanity of which we are a part, of which our nation, our India, is "a separate yet inseparable member". With what passion and eloquence, Aurobindo speaks for education to usher in "the alchemy of infinity into the finite life" as reflected in the brave ones of our tradition like Markandeya, Savitri and Arjuna!

Fifty four years ago the American general, Douglas MacArthur made a speech to cadets at the West Point military academy in the United States. That speech has been quoted time and time again and I shall make a reference to it here. It spoke of learning to master yourself before you seek to master others, to have a heart that is clean, a goal that is high, to learn to laugh, yet never forget how to weep, to reach into the future, to be serious, yet never take yourself too seriously, to be modest and understand the simplicity of true greatness, the open mind of true wisdom, the meekness of true strength. When the final roll call is taken, these are the values we should be judged by. Those words spoken to an audience of young military cadets are equally applicable to you, for these same values especially about duty, honour and country will make you worthy of being seen as the best of your generation if you internalize them, and make them your code of conduct.

True leadership is about durable achievement that you can be proud of at the end of your lives. One day let your grandchildren speak with pride about what you did - that you increased food security, you solved maternal and child health and nutrition problems, that you were a beloved educator and public servant, engineer, scientist and innovator, that you promoted peace, consensus and trust building with our neighbours, that you were incorruptible. You do not want to be remembered otherwise. Develop the capacity to keep your eye over the horizon, and not be entrapped in the petty immediacy of narrowly defined interests. I wish you joy in the service of India.

I am often asked about my own life's journey and what I can tell my younger compatriots about the lessons I have learnt. Of course, I cannot offer magic potions or prescriptions. Each individual's life is distinct and special and unique in its own way. But from my own experience as a woman in diplomacy and foreign service, I would urge you all to stay focused, determined, and persevering in all the tasks that come your way. Be open-minded, transparent in your dealings, let honesty and integrity never desert you, and be compassionate to your fellow human beings. Regard life as a never-ending process of learning. Never lose your idealism and reject cynicism like a poison. The rest you learn and absorb as you row your boat along the river of life.

Our country is one that plays by the rules and covenants of international behaviour with conviction and with responsibility, while defending the national interest. We do not proliferate dangerous weapon technologies, our laws and our institutions are well-functioning and democratic, we do not stifle free expression, we follow the paths of peace and negotiation, of deterrence rather than military confrontation and conflict. Our independence of thought and the actions that follow from it, are what we hold sacred. We can never be orbiters even as we do not seek orbiters. We seek the traffic of ideas, the flow of knowledge, investment and capital, the unrestricted two way passage of professionals beyond borders, we seek stability in our neighbourhood, we want our neighbours to grow and prosper even as we do. But we will not cede an inch to terrorism, militancy and aggression and we will fight these threats with all the power at our command.

A word about the humanities and liberal arts. I have been witness in different parts of the world, to a debate about the role of the humanities in university education. The question asked is why do humanities matter in a democracy? As less and less attention or importance is given to humanities is there a long term cost to democracy? A good humanities education inculcates critical thinking in the student, it provides knowledge of world history and religions and helps us to be less obtuse about other cultures and other people. Literature, for instance, trains, as it is said, "the muscles of the mind". In Brazil today, I understand that philosophy is a subject that is taught in secondary schools to all students so as to make them more aware of the importance of the examined life, as the ancient Greeks put it.

I believe the same applies to our country. We are global frontrunners in the engineering and sciences, and there is a premium on studies in mathematics, physics and medicine to cite examples. But for our demographic dividend to be a democratic dividend we must also pay close attention to building in our youth the skills that make them responsible and committed citizens of our democracy. Awareness of the world outside the prisms of religion, caste or community must be cultivated and focused upon. Respect and adherence to our constitutional precepts and values should be paramount. The Constitution is the foundational religion of democracy. The idea of India rests on it.

Let me return again to this beautiful campus, even as my mind has wandered over a rather large landscape. In his inaugural speech at the founding of this University in 1958, India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru remarked that the site chosen for the University campus was beautiful not only as a site but also as an idea, because every place is associated with some ideas and thoughts. Every stone has a story to tell. Thousands of pictures of antiquity roll before you. The caves, rocks and temples of Ellora tell their story. It is good and instructive to understand the past, he said. But in order to understand the past properly you are also required to know perfectly well both your present day and future duties. Solutions of the past cannot be applied to present day problems but the monumental achievements of times past can inspire us and spur us on. Our minds must work, must innovate, must understand the new algorithms of the world around us. At the same time, we must remain faithful to the genius of our country and our civilization. But the clay – the timber of humanity - from which we are made must be strengthened and become even more resilient if we are to grow and prosper in the modern world.

Mr. Nehru spoke of the past and the present in the context of our University, those long years ago. Just as the French political thinker, Ernest Renan said that a nation is a soul, a spiritual principle, so too a university has a soul, and it is founded on a spiritual principle. The past is the soul, the rich legacy of memories we possess, the other is the present where we come together, and we wisely invest in the heritage we have jointly received from this soil and the brick and mortar which have built our institution. Just as in a nation, the university must possess its moral conscience, sanctity of thought, a belief in its mission, a charter of wise principles. You have these virtues. The great Indian, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, whose name our university bears, nurtured that view and cherished that belief and we must always make that our lodestar as we move into the future. Knowledge is our ultimate wealth, our sacrament.

विद्या-धनं सर्व-धन-प्रधानम् ॥ .

Knowledge is the greatest wealth of all.

हे ज्ञानिची पवित्रता। ज्ञानीचि आथि

***Knowledge is Sacred; it is supreme,
The source of ultimate enlightenment.***

God bless you all.