

Ramakrishna Mission Sikshanamandira

12th Convocation Address

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Prof. Santa Dutta (De), Vice Chancellor, University of Calcutta, Swami Vidyamritananda, Principal of Ramakrishna Mission Sikshanamandira, other dignitaries on and off the dais, members of the faculty and staff, and all the graduating teachers and teacher-educators. I am privileged and honored to be with all of you today on the 12th Convocation of the Post Graduate Autonomous College of Teacher Education, the first such autonomous institution in Eastern India. It is a great pleasure and honor for me to be amongst you today, on one of the most important occasions of any educational institute – its convocation. Standing on the haloed precincts of a college guided by the principle of Swami Vivekananda that “Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man”, is in itself a humbling experience. Education is the best gift that can be given to anybody. And what can be better than to educate the educator, who will then spread the light of knowledge to many others. This is what Sikshanamandira has been doing for more than six decades, since its establishment in 1958. The objective of this institution is to instill values, competency, and integrity to the future generation of teachers and teacher-educators and to set an example of teaching at its pinnacle. Mark the two key words here, values and integrity. Any education system would want to make its students more competent, but unless based on the ideals of truth and integrity, all education falls apart. This is possibly the biggest ailment of today’s education. We seek to transfer knowledge and skill to the students, without focusing on imparting values. Thus, we run the risk of churning out highly skilled professionals to whom qualities like truth, honesty, respect, responsibility and integrity are mere words – to be discarded as soon as it conflicts with the objective of achieving material gain in this world of cut-throat competition. Ramakrishna Mission Sikshanamandira stands out in this regard by focusing on value-based education to future educators who in their careers will educate many more. I congratulate all those who will be graduating today. You have been exposed to one of the best education system that this country can offer. Use the techniques and ideals that you have learnt in this great institution wisely and for the benefit of the society. Come tomorrow, your skills will be tested in the real world, and I hope you will play your role in educating the future generations in a way that the aspiration of this country to become a vibrant and self-reliant economy by 2047 when we celebrate 100 years of independence comes true. Your teachers will also, in a way, be tested as to how well they have groomed and inspired you. Remember, your success or failure will be partly theirs. Therefore, you carry a great responsibility. Prove yourselves worthy of this institution. I remind you of the words of Vivekananda: *“Take up one idea. Make that one idea your life — think of it, dream of it, live on that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body, be full of that idea, and just leave every other idea alone. This is the way to success, and this is the way great spiritual giants are produced.”* I wish you all the best.

I come from an Institution of higher learning just across the river - the Indian Statistical Institute -a place which can be truly called the Mecca of mathematics and statistics. Its founder was the legendary physicist turned statistician Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis, who gave the world, among many things, the Mahalanobis distance. He was the architect of the second five-year plan of India, and was instrumental in getting the first computer in India to the Indian Statistical Institute in Kolkata. Many other stalwarts did great science and mathematics in India - JC Bose, Ramanujan, CV Raman, Meghnad Saha, SN Bose, and the list goes on. It is true that now boundaries are not clear when it comes to research excellence. However, I think we all will agree that India is feeling a great need for scientific geniuses to be doing brilliant science and of the best entrepreneurs to be creating wealth for the country. Great work is going on in the country, but only in silos. A deep re-look at our educational system at all levels of studies is the need of the day to determine what ails our systems. This is where I believe Institutions like the one you are graduating from can show the way. Institutions that put great emphasis on excellence built on strong pillars of values.

We are seeing tremendous advancement in science and technology that has transformed our lives in multiple ways. The development of communication technology and the Internet has led to constant connectivity with the external world. The small mobile phone has provided power to the common person, making information available at our fingertips. Humans have gone from the outer space to the deep ocean, from the mighty universe to understanding the minutest particles that make up a living organism. Remarkable progress in Artificial Intelligence threatens to upset even the last bastion of the human mind – the power of creativity. These days young and old are relying on ChatGPT for almost everything. Very

recently, I was in Italy on an academic visit and used the weekend for touring some cities. ChatGPT planned our visits to these new places. At the end of the trip, I must admit that the plans provided by this tool were rather good and useful. Such tools, based on something called Generative AI, is being used to create objects of art – paintings, music, poetry. Matters have come to such a level that a recent study shows that AI-generated poetry is "indistinguishable from human-written poetry" and "rated more favourably".

This is the era of data and information. Science is in a phase where data is driving scientific discoveries. A nation that can make the best use of data, that owns the capability to convert the data into knowledge will lead the world. And this presents India with a great opportunity. This is a bus we cannot afford to miss. Our country has high intellectual capital. We have proved ourselves to the world in our skills in information technology and computer science. We now have to focus on generating and owning knowledge in the country. We need to gradually transform ourselves from a service-based economy to a knowledge economy and there my friends, you have a great role to play. India desperately needs to reach out to the talents that are hidden in our villages, in small towns and amongst the women who have been missing in the different areas of education. India needs to innovate to tap this untapped human resource and provide them with adequate opportunities and a conducive eco system so that they can contribute to the knowledge generation. From where the next innovation, the next invention, the next discovery will come no one knows. Often you will face challenging situations, and will have to make difficult choices. At such junctures, do not be afraid to take risks and step into unknown territory if required. As the saying goes, "A ship in harbor is safe — but that is not what ships are built for". Remember, if you try you may fail, if you do not try you have already failed.

India faces a large number of challenges, from feeding its masses, to providing clean water, clean air, quality healthcare, education, transportation, clean energy to name just a few. While it has to take care of the basic needs of its huge population, it also has to aspire to reach the moon, to go to outer space, to build the quantum computer and to delve deep within the atom. I urge you, young friends, to play your role in this huge scheme of things. This country needs us. There will be great challenges, great obstacles, but never give up. Towards the end of his life, Rabindranath Tagore had agonized over the devastation being caused by self-identity based nationalism and the pettiness of the human mind. Yet he remarked "And yet I shall not commit the grievous sin of losing faith in man" with a dream of a new dawn, that "perhaps will come from this horizon, from the East where the sun rises". Young friends, have faith, work hard and the world is yours for the taking. Go out, and make your mark.

Thank you.

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