

Convocation Address, 2013

Professor Basab Chowdhury

Registrar, University of Calcutta

Respected Chairman of the Convocation Meet, Revered Swami Divyanandaji Maharaj, Secretary of Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha as well as Sikshanamandira , Respected Prof. Moqbul Islam, Respected Principal Swami Tattwasarananda, Revered Monks of the Ramakrishna Order, Respected Members of the Faculty, Students, Scholars and Most important of all, the Pass-outs or Graduates who are going to get their Degrees in this Convocation:

At the very outset, could I express my sense of gratitude to all of you for giving me the opportunity to address the Convocation? I am indeed thankful to Revered swami Divyanandaji Maharaj and Swami Tattwasarananda for kindly inviting me today. As I stand here, I feel humbled; I remember: about 35 years ago, a young boy walked through the gates of the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira with his father for getting admission to an Honours Course in Chemistry in the B. Sc. Class. He was not much aware of the outside world then; he had a lot of confusion and although he was offered Honours admission in Mathematics or Physics in Colleges like the St. Xaviers College, he was keen to study Chemistry in Vidyamandira. He cannot comment even today whether the decision was correct; but he knows what was decided then cannot be undone now. Life is indeed a great mystery; perhaps an eternal journey, and one has to embark on that journey with spirits undaunted. That was the lesson he learnt at this sacred place and since then, he has come to Belur Math many times. It is in fact astonishing that the same boy today is on the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira and also of the Naredrapur Ramakrishna Mission College; and he is on the Academic Council of the St. Xaviers. And

what a great fortune that the same boy has been given the privilege to stand before this august audience today to deliver the Convocation Speech which would not have been possible without the blessings showered from eternity represented by Sri Sri Thakur, the omnipotent Ma, and the epitome of energy in man Swamiji. Can't we term it as a kind of "tryst with destiny"? I do not know. I pay my homage, my prayer to Sri Sri Thakur, Ma and Swamiji.

We have an outstanding audience today and it is difficult for me to say something totally novel before this audience. I will still try. For some time now, a thought often comes to my mind: what did Swami Vivekananda do for which he is so much loved and revered by his countrymen? What was that idea, an idea of his own which he forcefully reinforced into the minds of the young generation of the country that still propels them to go on in the face of all adversities? Why did Rabindranath prescribe to Romain Rolland, if you want to know India, read Vivekananda? What is great about Vivekananda; what is truly fascinating about him?

In the year 1813, Rajah Rammohun had settled in Calcutta. The boat of Hinduism was caught in the storm then. Rajah Rammohun wanted to infuse western thoughts into the so-called Hindu religion and in the process laid the foundation of the "Brahmo Dharma". Young and educated people getting some enlightenment from western education and being frustrated by the rigid Hindu ways of leading life were getting drawn towards Christianity. The villages were still in the mediaeval period, practically untouched by the light of modernity. Child marriages were rampant; women were in tottering conditions then. It was an utterly confused state of affairs and in this whirlpool, Calcutta's Simulia area was blessed with a boy called Sri Narendranath Datta. And what do you expect Narendranath to be? In my opinion, he grew out of confusion; out of "NETI, NETI" to find a way out towards "ITI, ITI". During that period in the British – ruled India, an IDEA was necessary; an idea that could transform the-

then Bengal or the-then India and Narendranath who later became Swami Vivekananda could read the situation and led from the front to bring the nation back to rails. He put MAN at the centre of all religion and said unambiguously that he would hold everyone a traitor as long as countrymen would be in such wretched conditions. To put MAN at the centre of things, to define divinity in him, to give him hope and courage so as to conquer this world, to create paradise on earth through emancipation, to lead him from the front so that he could manifest the perfection already in him: to sum up – that was the IDEA propounded by Vivekananda. He declared with thunderous voice: “We are children of Bliss,” no sinners are we, and therefore, we should not look morose and sombre. It is said, nothing in Vivekananda is negative, and everything in him is positive. Yes, “cowardice is sin; weakness means death.” Therefore, “Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached.” And what is the goal? “*Atmano moksharthang jagaddhitaya cha.*” Through this great Mantra, Swamiji reformed the age-old Indian monastic culture and motivated them towards karma; at the same time, he motivated the Indian household to concentrate on Service to Mankind.

Ladies and Gentlemen, more than one hundred years after Swamiji propounded his great theory of Service to Mankind, the corporations and Indian think-tank including the political establishment have talked about Service Industry. I would now like to request the audience to “visualize” as Swamiji used to ask his disciples to do; when Service to Mankind is combined with initiative, indomitable courage, awakening and action, you get Service Industry, and we have talked about it after more than one hundred years after Swamiji’s pronouncements. Do think about the progress of this country if the theory of the Service Industry was accepted whole-heartedly by the Indian Governments just after the independence and the foundations were laid. We missed the bus as we did not listen to Swami Vivekananda.

As a man of action, Swamiji developed the first Indian Multinational Corporation, the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, and this brand name brings awe-inspiring thoughts in our minds. That was Vivekananda and he did all these in a span of thirty-nine years! Only Vivekananda could say, “Religion is the manifestation of the divinity already in man,” and perhaps all of us can see the connection. His heart was full of divine spirit that gave him courage and enthusiasm to catch hold of the Nation’s hair and say unambiguously to shake off all forms of weakness.

Please allow me to turn my attention now to those fortunate few who will get their Degrees and Diplomas in this Convocation. Friends, all of you, the successful graduates and post-graduates, are blessed because you are getting your Degrees from Ramakrishna Mission Sikshan Mandira. Do remember that this is a Brand whose Brand value goes on increasing as you grow older. In this world, all goods and services get out-dated as they age or grow older. Only the Brand of the Ramakrishna Mission goes on increasing with time. When I was a student here in the Vidyamandira, I did not realize this. As I am growing older, I am realizing that I got a gift from my father through the invisible hands of the Almighty; I got admitted here in the Vidyamandira. Dear friends, the privileged few today, I take this opportunity to congratulate all of you on your success and on getting Degrees from this great Institute. I know that you will cherish this moment ever in your life. A degree or diploma is a Certificate; but when it has the emblem of the Ramakrishna Mission, it becomes golden, and as you all know, gold does not rust.

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, we in India are passing through difficult times. In spite of efforts from the Government, poverty and illiteracy are rampant; the gross enrolment ratio in higher education is still 15%. In the villages, this figure is much lower. We need to improve upon these and no government can do it without active support of the young men and women.

Swamiji realized this and called upon the youth to dedicate their lives for the cause of the country. We need people today with absolute integrity. There are many clever people in this country who are successful and rich. What we generally lack is integrity. Without integrity, all success comes to a nought. Therefore, in the names of Sri Sri Thakur, Ma and Swamiji, please pray at this hour for integrity throughout your lives. All of you are successful; please employ your success to build pavements along which the less fortunate can walk through. That is Swamiji's teaching and please make that true in your lives.

Ladies and gentlemen, I will end my speech by quoting from Albert Einstein who said, "A human being is a part of a whole, called by us Universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty."

Thank you.