

Address by Anil Kakodkar during the inaugural session of National Teachers' Congress

As the President of the first National Teachers' Congress let me at the outset greet all teachers, dignitaries, invitees and indeed every one present here to this large gathering of teachers. To my mind our human capital is our most precious asset given that we are a country with the largest youth potential and we are fast embracing the emerging knowledge era. In that sense this congress of teachers who shape the young minds is the most important platform to deliberate on the strategies and issues that confront teachers in their performance of their intended functions. I am gratified to see a broad cross section of stake holders in education present here.

Education in our country has to confront with two major challenges. One relates to quality and the other to universal access. Further these challenges exist at all levels (preschool, primary, secondary, higher secondary and higher) of education. Regardless of level to which one decides to pursue formal education, it is clear that education must be a holistic learning experience that facilitates comprehension and understanding of things around, acquisition of procedural knowledge to be a professional in chosen area as well as related training and skills. More importantly inculcation of values and sensitivity towards people and nature around us and an attitude of sharing each other's joy and sorrow should also be an integral part of every one's learning process. Teaching institutions should thus create a comprehensive environment that facilitates these and other elements of learning with teachers playing the role of mentors. To be able to play such a role, teachers must themselves be involved, along with students in activities like research, problem solving, community engagement etc. as appropriate. Clearly we need to shed the silo mentality and be a part

of a mini real life world right within the education domain. Rather than allowing the degeneration that we see in the world around from dominating the education domain, we should expect education domain to set the example that would positively influence the external world.

We often notice that while there are silos within the knowledge domain, the knowledge domain by and large has not been engaging deep enough with the society and the economy domain except for making the the human resource available. Economy and society engaging with each other is inevitable since the issue of livelihood is involved. While this may generate trade, we need to see a far greater engagement between knowledge domain and society as well as economy domain for generating technologies. More importantly this is necessary for sustaining values and greater level of wisdom in the society. We have had a rich heritage on these aspects. Our society had recognised teachers to be more important than God being the guides to reaching Him. While the teachers need to regain their ability to shape the society, the society must also create, with respect, conditions for teachers to be able to do so.

This is where the question of autonomy and liberal support to knowledge domain comes in. Sooner, we as a society learn to do so, better it would be for our progress in today's competitive world. With centuries of neglect the transition to excellence may not be very easy. However it would be best to leave it to knowledge domain to learn its way forward rather than trying to impose correction from out side where prevalence of wisdom is any way questionable.

Today's world is a world of rapid transitions driven by fast changing technologies. We are noticing serious impact of these transitions on the societal scene. In order to maintain itself on the right path, higher level of wisdom in the society has become more important today than any time

before. We therefore need to urgently pay greater attention to reforms in the education domain. Along with Dr. Mashelkar, Dr. Takwale, Dr. Nigvekar, Dr. Bhatkar, late Mrs. Kumud Bansal and many others, I had the good fortune of looking at the higher education scene in Maharashtra. It has been years since we submitted the report. It is important that we move forward with the substance of the report and not just its form. Adherence to form without paying attention to substance has been causing greater damage as history has shown us time and again.

Finally let me come to the rural domain. Here we have a bigger challenge of access because of connectivity limitations. There is also a question of bridging the urban rural gap even as we aspire to catch on with the opportunities of the emerging knowledge era. In my view the education must be integrally linked to development processes in the region keeping the new opportunities in view. We must take full advantage of the fact that the emerging knowledge technologies strongly support democratisation and decentralisation. The constraints of Industrial era that necessarily favoured urbanisation are fast getting diluted. Here is thus an opportunity take economy in villages to a level comparable or even better than cities with villages offering a much better quality of life.

Let us hope that this Teachers Congress with its broad participation at all levels would help a collective movement to take teaching to its rightful place. It is also appropriate that today we have recognised two teachers who have been key institution builders in the teaching domain and we would be recognising two eminent and most respected teachers on the concluding day. May I use this occasion to pay my respects to Dr. Vishwanath Karad, Dr. Mujumdar as well as to Prof. Sukhatme and Prof. Natarajan.

Thank you.