

Convocation Address delivered by Selvi J Jayalalithaa, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu at the 155th Annual Convocation of the University of Madras on 17.8.2013.

I am greatly honoured to be part of this scintillating event that marks a major academic milestone in your life, as you step out into the world from the portals of this University, fortified with the knowledge you have been endowed with during your time here. It is also a special event for the University as it sends forth its students equipped with the spirit of this institution. The overwhelming ceremonial aura of this Annual Convocation is tremendously energizing and bears testimony to the 156 year old grand tradition of one of the oldest universities of the Country – the University of Madras. A Convocation is the occasion when all the hard work and midnight toil put in around the years is crystallised and is a formal recognition that you are ready to move forward in channelizing your energies towards being a complete entity in Society, adapting fearlessly and energetically to changing times. It is a moment of celebration for students and their parents who have transcended odds and striven hard to reach here. For the teachers who are waiting to witness these scholars pass out it is an endorsement of their hard work and a validation of the vocation they chose.

The University of Madras has lived up to the ideals ordained in its creation since its inception and I am sure it will continue to catalyze the flowering of human personality as well as function as a reservoir from which spring streams of innovation and imagination, of dynamism in thought and action.

The glorious history of this institution is a reminder of the journey traversed so far and will serve to enlighten future generations. The University of Madras was established in response to the demand of the time. The request for an institution of higher learning originated from the people of the Madras Presidency, in a public petition signed and submitted to Lord George Elphinstone, the then Governor of Madras. Sir Charles Wood's epoch-making Dispatch of 1854 cleared the path for the formation of the Universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. The University Act, Act No. II of 1857, was passed by the Legislative Council and received the Governor-General's assent on the 24th January, 1857. The Act emphasised that the University was to be an imperial university. As a sequel, the University of Madras, organized on the model of the London University, was incorporated on the 5th September, 1857, by an Act of the Legislative Council of India. The Government's intention was to create a University which would cater to the needs of the nobility and upper classes of India.

Justice Sir Christopher Rawlinson was the first Vice-Chancellor of the University. In 1904, Sir Subramania Iyer became the first Indian to be made the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Madras. Sir Raghupati Venkataratnam Nayudu was the first elected Vice Chancellor. The University of Madras was the first to introduce autonomous colleges within the University system in 1978-79. Since then, 27 out of the 159 affiliated institutions have become autonomous. The tiny star which appeared in 1857 has now grown into a super nova churning out treasures of enlightened and inspired citizens. This institution has an academic heritage, created and nurtured by stalwarts and visionaries.

The establishment of the University of Madras proved to be a tool of history, initiating a process quite independent of the original intention of the British to create an aristocratic institution and ultimately became directly contradictory to it. It has endeavoured to create an open and secular system and seeks to deliberately incorporate inclusiveness into the fabric of education. It has broken the shackles of the 'Ivory tower' and has thrown open the gates of the once 'elitist institution' to the common people. The University of Madras has been carefully accomplishing the task of synthesizing academic standards with social relevance to create ignited minds ready to take up enterprising careers and raring to reform the ills threatening our Society. The architectural beauty of the impressive Indo-Saracenic buildings of the University and the charm of the premises add to the character of this institution. This in itself has a potent influence on the students.

Universities are temples of knowledge wherein students are initiated as novices into the mysteries of knowledge. They have frequently been regarded as key institutions in processes of social change and development. The most explicit role they have been allocated is the production of highly skilled labour and research output to meet perceived economic ends. Universities do not only respond to Society's needs, they contribute to its evolution. Universities in Tamil Nadu are now finding themselves at the very centre of development and are entrusted with the task of training and harnessing vital human resources essential for catapulting Tamil Nadu to the numero uno status in the country.

The University of Madras has pegged the stakes high for its students and the alumni have distinguished themselves in various fields of excellence in India and abroad and brought laurels to their Alma Mater. The Madras University boasts of many stalwarts as its alumni. It has produced two Nobel laureates, - Sir C V Raman who won the Nobel prize for Physics in 1930 and Dr S Chandrasekar in 1983, and two Presidents of India - Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Dr A P J Abdul Kalam, to name a few. The list however is endless with hundreds of faculty members and students proving their mettle both in India and abroad. They are all shining examples for the young people here to emulate. You need to learn from the dedication, scholarly pursuit and will to succeed of these eminent personalities.

Education is a powerful tool for human progress and empowerment. It is also a strong driver of social thinking and transformation. True education should emphasise achievement of human resource development in its entirety and thereby augment the Nation's richest asset. Imparting ethical values, as a significant constituent of education, therefore, is no longer merely obligatory but a constitutional imperative, essential for the development and realization of the full potential of the human person. Socrates had said and I quote: "*Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel*" (unquote). The atmosphere in this hall today is vibrant and I believe that many a flame has been kindled by this great institution.

An ancient Chinese proverb says,
 "If you are thinking one year ahead, plant rice
 If you are thinking ten years ahead, plant trees
 If you are thinking 100 years ahead, educate the people."

My Government has done all three. I am committed to providing good governance now, in the years ahead, the decades to come and to implementing lasting reforms that generations will speak of. The mission of my Government is to promote Human Resource Development through self-actualized Institutions producing high quality professionals in sufficient numbers and to make Tamil Nadu a global hub for University Education. I envision that Institutions of Higher Education emerge as Centres of Innovation, Excellence and Development - that world-class education is offered to our youth in an all-encompassing and inclusive system. The Higher Education sector in Tamil Nadu is moving at an accelerated pace to meet the demands of the century, in terms of research and development and many schemes have been implemented with this in view. For example,

- i. Smart Classrooms with Video- Conferencing facilities have been established in 10 universities at a cost of 2 crore rupees.
- ii. Foreign language laboratories have been established in 10 universities at a cost of 1.5 crore rupees for enhancing the language skills of students in English, Chinese, Japanese, German etc.,
- iii. Entrepreneurship cum Skill Development Centres have been established at a cost of 2 crore rupees in 10 Universities, to develop the entrepreneurial skills of students for self employment.
- iv. To promote gaining from sharing of expertise by reputed professors, a scheme of inviting them from foreign universities has been introduced in 10 Universities at a cost of 1 crore rupees.
- v. Curriculum Development Cells have been established in 10 Universities at a cost of 10 crore rupees, to restructure curricula on par with global standards
- vi. 11 new Arts and Science Colleges have been opened during 2011-2012 and another 11 colleges during 2012-2013, in various Districts, in an effort to equip rural youth with career skills and improve their employability.
- vii. 10 Polytechnic Colleges and 2 Engineering Colleges have been started in a move to promote professional education in rural pockets and ensure that youth in the far flung backward Districts are on par with their counterparts in big cities.
- viii. Business Collaboration Centres have been started in 6 Universities of which the University of Madras is one, for co-ordinating Universities, leading Industries and other business organizations in the country and abroad.
- ix. A widely acclaimed move by my Government is the Study Abroad Programme for Faculty and Students which has commenced with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding by The Tamil Nadu State Council for Higher Education with the British Council. 14 students and 3 faculty members have been selected to study one semester in Universities in the United Kingdom from September 2013 to January 2014.
- x. Centres for Technical and Academic Writing have been established in the University of Madras and 8 other Universities in the State. These Centres would develop the skills of students in writing academic reports and drafting other forms of written communication.
- xi. Incubation and Technology Transfer Centres have been established in the University of Madras and 8 other Universities in the State.

- xii. Centres for Multimodal Material Production for the Differently-Abled have been established in the University of Madras and 9 other Universities in the State.
- xiii. Post Graduate Centres of Excellence have been established in this University and 9 other Universities in the State.
- xiv. Soft Skill Centres have been established in 30 Colleges under 5 Universities including the University of Madras.
- xv. The free laptop computer scheme, which is a flagship scheme of my Government, was devised bearing in mind that our students must not be left lagging behind in the use of modern technology in this age of the internet and has placed our students a head above their peers in other parts of the country. So far 5,45,402 college students have received their laptop computers.

This is only an overview of the efforts taken by my Government to raise the scales of development on the higher education front. We must direct our energies towards developing our Universities to meet global benchmarks. Universities should be prime movers of change. A more just, humane, and sustainable Society requires the development in each of our students of a personal moral compass and a commitment to ethical decision making. It is necessary not merely to achieve personal excellence, but also to enable the Nation to rise to higher levels of endeavour and achievement. Here, I would like to quote Benjamin Franklin who said, "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn." Learning should be a two-way process and should involve the intellect and heart of the student and the faculty. Social commitment on the part of the educationists cannot be overlooked.

As you set out on the next steps of your journey, and as you cross many more milestones that mark your achievements, I am sure you will proudly recall the value of the opportunities that the University of Madras gave you, and how it empowered you to achieve success. With confidence, you leave this place, ready and determined to do your part in the never-ending quest to advance peace, prosperity and justice in your environment, to choose your own paths, to risk failure, to further the boundaries of knowledge, and to shine forth as worthy citizens of this great Nation. Whichever path you choose, and whichever gates you pass through, I wish you safety, good guidance, and truthfulness. I wish that you may be guided wisely through the tunnels and labyrinths of life and that you find the still centre of your purpose and your being - untarnished, persistent, illuminated and brightly glowing.

On this auspicious occasion, I urge you to solemnly reaffirm the ideals of the University and dedicate yourselves wholeheartedly to the task of building a resurgent Nation of high idealism and noble endeavours on the foundation of knowledge and moral values. I invoke upon each one of you, the blessings of the Almighty, your parents, your teachers and all the elders gathered here.

Thank you.
