

ALAGAPPA UNIVERSITY, KARAIKUDI

Twenty Second Convocation Address

by

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Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Mr. Justice S Mohan, Members of the Syndicate, Faculty, Students, Parents and graduating class of the University!

2. I am happy to address you at your 22nd Convocation.

3. Mr. Justice S Mohan has been conferred an honorary degree of Doctor of Literature (Honoris Causa). He is a man of many parts. He was an able lawyer, a dedicated teacher and a distinguished Judge. He is a scholar in Tamil but writes poetry in English! As a Judge, he delivered many significant judgements. I wish to recall his judgement in 1995 where the Supreme Court declared that spectrum was public property and the right to use airways/frequencies for broadcasting was part of the freedom of speech.

4. On April 6 last year, the centenary celebrations of Dr. Alagappa Chettiar were concluded. He sowed the seeds of higher learning in the barren land in this part of Tamil Nadu. No one, at that time, would have

imagined that those seeds would sprout many plants that would grow into mighty trees and become a University. Dr. Alagappa Chettiar was a living legend, an intrepid and unusual entrepreneur, and an unstoppable force in bringing the benefits of education to this backward district. He passed away many years before the University was constituted. However, in a rare posthumous tribute, the State Government named this University after him.

5. In the twenty four years since its establishment, the University has brought the benefits of higher education in a number of disciplines to thousands of students who come from all the corners of the country. Many of them are from rural areas and are first-generation university students. The University is now accredited by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council and has been awarded "A" grade. That places it amongst a select band of universities in the country.

6. What is the purpose of higher education? A mundane and practical purpose is to turn out qualified men and women to hold jobs or handle professional tasks. After all, we need clerks and supervisors and managers. We also need engineers, doctors, teachers and so on. No society can do without these jobs. And to the extent that universities are able to produce better qualified and better equipped men and women to do these jobs, they provide an indispensable service.

7. All our universities and institutions of higher learning put together are able to accommodate only about 11 to 12 per cent of the students who pass out of schools. If we take into account the fact that over 50 per cent of the students who enrol in schools do not complete their school education, the effective number of educable students who join a University is no more than 6 per cent. It is this six per cent of the children born every year who are trained and equipped to hold key jobs and responsibilities that are absolutely necessary for our society. On this six per cent, the country spends vast amounts of money. Thus, this six per cent is the cream of our society. They have the power to shape our society. They have the power to make it a strong, caring, compassionate and great society. They also have the power – if misused – to make our society weak, backward looking, selfish and corrupt.

8. History is replete with examples of civilisations that reached great heights but were soon buried under the weight of their inertia and lack of creativity. Social historians have a word for this phenomenon: it is called stasis. History is also replete with examples of countries that have stood at the cross roads and were required to make a choice. Recent history has thrown up examples of countries that made correct choices and forged ahead on the path of progress and development. Japan seized the moment after the atomic explosions, surrendered, made peace with its enemies, and began a truly historic journey towards becoming the world's second largest economy. The two Germanys saw the opportunity when

the Berlin wall fell: they quickly united, readily transferred vast resources from West Germany to East Germany, and charted a path that has made them the dominant economy in Europe. Smaller countries have also seized opportunities that came their way and among them are Singapore, Malaysia, Bhutan, Angola and Rwanda.

9. India's chance came in 1991. We took it with one hand. Another chance came in 1999; we blew it because of our inward looking and atavistic programmes. The third chance came in 2004. We took it with both hands and the results are there for everyone to see. Between 2004-05 and 2008-09, India's GDP grew by an unprecedented annual rate of 8.5 per cent. During that five year period we became an acknowledged nuclear power; landed a space craft on the moon; sequenced and assembled the whole genome of an Indian; developed a transgenic cotton variety; and manufactured the world's lowest priced car.

10. We have another chance today. What we do with that chance depends on you and thousands of other young men and women who will graduate every year from our colleges and universities. Will you be content with average ambition, average integrity, average performance and average achievement? Or will you be determined to take India to great heights just as every Chinese youth seems to be? China wants to become the world's largest economy. If India's population will exceed China's in or about the year 2030, why do we not have the burning

ambition to become the world's largest economy? China has accumulated the largest foreign reserves of any country. Why do we not have the ambition to produce more, to export more, to acquire more reserves and convert those reserves into precious assets and resources all over the world? China aims to become the top sporting nation in the world. Why do we muddle our way through hosting the Commonwealth Games?

11. To look for answers to these questions I ask you to look inward. Ask yourself, "Do I have the knowledge, the training, the determination, the ambition and the inter-personal skills to take me to the top of my profession?" Ask yourself, "Do I have a set of values that will help me demand more from my fellow workers?" Also ask yourself, "Do I care enough about my country that I will do all that is in my power to ensure good governance of the country?" There are more questions that you can ask yourself. If more and more people ask these questions and more and more people find the right answers, you would be able to make India a great country, a country that you can be proud of and a country that your children and grand-children will be truly proud to inherit.

12. I congratulate the prize and award winners and offer my good wishes to the graduating class. I wish you success in your endeavours.