

Speech: Inauguration of Central University Thiruvarur

Hon. Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Kalaignar M Karunanidhi;

Hon. Deputy Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Thiru M. K. Stalin;

My beloved colleague in the Council of Ministers, Hon. Minister of State,

Thiru S. S. Palanimanickam;

Dr. K. Ponmudy, Hon. Minister for Higher Education, Govt of Tamil Nadu;

Thiru. U. Mathivanan, Hon. Minister for Dairy Development, Tamil Nadu;

Thiru. A. K. S. Vijayan, Hon. Member of Parliament;

Prof. B. P. Sanjay, Vice Chancellor, Tamil Nadu Central University;

Distinguished Members of the Executive and Academic Councils;

My esteemed friends from the print and electronic media;

Yenadhu anbir kuriya tamil makkalay (My most beloved brethren of Tamil Nadu)

Today is a historic day for this holy place. Thiruvarur is the historical place where justice prevailed, literature and arts flourished and classical music consummated. It was the capital city of Manu Needhi Cholan who took away the life of his own son to provide justice. A stone chariot depicting the legend of Manu Neethi Cholan, is found here. Thiruvarur is also the birthplace of Carnatic Music Trinity of Tyagaraja, Muthuswamy Dikshitar and Syama Sastri. They were not merely literary scholars or doyens of music but were saint composers who devoted their lives to the pursuit of knowledge and arts enlivened through Bhakti. This ancient town of the Chola heartland is famous for its Tyagaraja temple and the annual chariot festival celebrated every April. I am extremely happy that a modern University, the Tamil Nadu Central University is inaugurated here

today. Thiruvavur, at the moment, may lack in connectivity and infrastructure, but these are things that could be built over a short period of time. I am particularly impressed at the alacrity with which the State Government under the dynamic leadership of its dynamic and legendary Chief Minister Thiru Karunanidhi proceeded to make available the required land for the University in record time. Given this zeal, enthusiasm and commitment of the State Government and of the Hon. Chief Minister, I am sure this University, before long will transform itself into a modern temple of learning and the pride of whole of South India. The rich cultural endowment and spiritual heritage of this holy city will be the soul of the modern University.

On this auspicious occasion marked by gaiety and celebrations, let me invite you for some introspection – of what a University stands for? Of what we can expect of the students who come out of this? The education or knowledge we receive in a University helps us to see ourselves as part of a global society, for we share the earth with other societies and cultures. It is natural for humans to live in societies, have a culture and speak a language. But these societies, cultures, languages and thoughts do not have to be the same. It is important to understand in what ways are the same as other inhabitants of the world and in what ways we are different. Studying at the University enlarges both our curiosity and understanding what existed before us, what exists with us and what will be the future. We are given the means and opportunity to ask how we are subject to the same laws that govern other physical objects in the natural world, what needs we share with other biological organisms, and in what ways we behave as other animals. We examine how our history as physical, biological and zoological entities form part of the history of the earth we inhabit, and how the history of the earth is intertwined with the history of other planets, satellites, stars, galaxies and the cosmos. The knowledge we get in a University helps us to appreciate how things happening in one place profoundly changes things at a different place. We see that changes that begin as physical or biological, cultural, economic or technological almost always initiate changes in other areas as well. This complex system of physical, biological, economic, cultural and technological constitutes the environment and changes in the environment decide how we live or whether we survive. The study of environment provides a good example of how and why a university education requires a perspective that is at the

same time that of a specialist and that is interdisciplinary. The knowledge that comes from studying physical and biological sciences, mathematics, the social and behavioural sciences, and arts and humanities needs to be integrated and embodied if we are to learn the importance of predicting what happens in and to the environment and protecting it for those who live now and for future generations. University study is also a study of oneself. We learn of ourselves as individuals, as inhabitants of the earth, as citizens of the world. By studying history and varieties of human expression, we enhance our sense of freedom and sense of our responsibility. We reflect on the events, texts and artifacts in which others express what they know, think, hope and imagine a human life to be. This enables us, as individuals, to think about how to live a meaningful life, choose the project that will be one's life and to fashion a way of being in the world. A university student thus becomes responsible for the kind of person he or she becomes. Most importantly, University education should make one generous, not being critical and analytical are not sufficient. We must be open to people, ideas, stories, beliefs, theories and artifacts we come across in a university. Because it is diversity of things, thoughts and people that make a university what it is. Being open does not mean agreement or acquiescence. On the contrary, being university educated requires that he or she challenges the truth of what is told, disagree when it lacks sufficient reason, and dissent when he or she is not persuaded by logic or evidence. Anybody who leaves a University shall not only be rational and critical but also courageous and kind. The test of whether I have received University education or not is this - have I left the University with just an appreciation of what I have learnt there or do I have a love for ideas, conversation and discovery?

Democracy, Demography and Diversity are the three D's which characterise modern India. It is through school education and higher education that we can transform these "D" into advantage India. Our young people have to tomorrow's workforce for not just India but the entire world. This transformation is not automatic, but has to be achieved at all costs. Our educational sector has to expand and expand exponentially. I am very happy that the historic Right To Education Bill has recently received the Presidential assent. Any child of India can now demand elementary education as a statutory right and the state has to compulsorily provide it through the "neighbourhood

schools". The neighbourhood schools should have the minimum quality standards in terms of teachers and infrastructure. We have just calculated approximately the costs of its implementation – it comes to a mammoth figure of 2,00,000 crores. Be that it may, the Government stands committed to providing the additional financial resources, because India's future is dependent on this. We can bite the bullet and tighten the belt.

School education provides the raw material for University education. Unless we have quality schools, we can't build up a robust university system. The Union Government has ensured now that all states have one central university each. My vision is that even when each such university specialises in one advanced or frontier areas, all of them should be networked in a seamless environment. Universities however should cease to be ivory towers, as models of elitism and sophistication. Interaction with local community, addressing local problems, carrying out research to improve industrial productivity, environmental amelioration etc should be integral to university education. I am calling a meeting of VC's of all central universities next week in Delhi to have a brainstorming on all these aspects. I am also happy to share some of the new initiatives, the central government is taking to improve and expand our universities. 14 world class universities are being established shortly. We will have world class infrastructure and world class faculty. I am introducing the Foreign Education Providers Bill in the next session of the Parliament. As you are aware, about 90,000 students from India go to the USA alone, every year for higher studies. If we can bring these universities to our doorstep, our young men and women are greatly benefitted. Even these Universities are benefitted – this is truly a win-win situation. But as you know, there is resistance from some quarters. But I am building a national consensus on this. We have to open up and become competitive; the same way we have opened our manufacturing and business, we have to open up our education. The whole developing world look to India as a leader for imparting quality education to the entire world. We have a historical responsibility to bear.

Education is in the Concurrent List. The Constitution bestows a heavy responsibility on the state Governments. I personally appreciate the contribution of Tamil Nadu that enjoys a substantially good track record in educational standards, GER

& institutional access in both public and private sector in comparison to other states. Particularly in the context of this Central University I would like to place on record the personal interest shown by the Honourable CM in ensuring that the administration at the State and District level works closely with us to ensure that the normal birth pangs of an Institution-temporary building and land are provided. Understandably there are certain issues that have to be addressed with regard to acquisition of land etc. I am sure all these issues will be sorted out swiftly.

The expectations from a new University are high. We need to recognise that educational institutions are built over a period of time and therefore patience needs to be factored in our expectations. Weekly reviews of the progress of the Universities have been initiated to ensure that the Ministry provide resources and support to facilitate the establishment, growth and sustenance of the new universities. All the new Central Universities are unitary in character in that they do not have to carry the load of monitoring or administering affiliated colleges. This would allow them to chart their progress with innovative programmes that meets high standards of teaching and research. Further, the all India character of these Institutions would allow for mingling of students, faculty and researchers from all over the country and if our reforms become a reality-world. Reputation of a University is established through its national and international identity and linkages and partnerships with global and reputed institutions is an important variable. Fortunately, we have a very competent, hardworking and committed educationist as the first Vice Chancellor in Prof. B.P. Sanjay. Let me remind him that both the central government and the Tamil Nadu Government have reposed a lot of confidence and hope in his leadership. I am sure he will continue to lead the University with passion and zeal. I have articulated a few steps that are needed in this direction in other meetings, discussion groups and through the media as well. Hopefully, we are likely to see the benefits of our initiatives in the near future. On a personal note of thanks and recognising the interest shown by this large public gathering I do hope that the Inauguration of this Central University will enhance and strengthen the higher education matrix.

I wish the University all success.