

IGNOU

Silver Jubilee Celebrations

Speech by

Shri. Kapil Sibal
Hon'ble Union Minister
of
Human Resource Development

on

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at

IGNOU,
Maidan Garhi, New Delhi

Hon'ble Rashtrapathiji Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil,

Smt. D. Purandeswari, MOS, HRD

Dr. Narendra Jadhav, Member, Planning Commission

Smt. Anshu Vaish, Secretary Education

Prof. V. N. Rajasekharan Pillai, Vice-Chancellor, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU),

Pro-Vice-Chancellors, Registrars, Officers, Teaching and Non-teaching Staff of the University, Distinguished invitees, representatives of the print and electronic media, and my dear students,

Today is the Birth Anniversary of our former Prime Minister Late Smt. Indira Gandhi. She was a great visionary and she envisioned an education system that provides the basis of life-long learning, so vital in the current context. She was of the view that, "Education should inculcate a lifelong habit of learning. And today, this is all the more necessary because the corpus of knowledge is increasing at a tremendous pace, often making what one has learnt obsolete." The University was established in 1985 in her memory by the then Prime Minister Shri Rajiv Gandhi.

On the occasion of the launch of Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the University, I join you all in paying tribute to these great prime ministers who were responsible for leading the country towards the path of development and growth.

I congratulate and extend my best wishes to the entire community of students, staff and the authorities of the University on the occasion of IGNOU's Silver Jubilee year.

Access to knowledge is fundamental to our bid to empower our people. We not only need to enhance the horizons of knowledge, but ensure that the 220 million children who go to school and the 160 million who are out of school have access to those ever-widening horizons. It is therefore, necessary to innovate and build alternative and effective mechanisms to enable such access. Open and Distance Education and Open Educational Resources can contribute enormously in this endeavour.

Open and Distance Learning is therefore, recognized as an accepted mode, providing a framework outside the formal schooling system. But access alone cannot be an objective in the context of our public pronouncement that expansion, inclusion and excellence are the three necessary pillars to impart quality education. Thus, Open and Distance Learning must, apart from access provide quality education, not just in the matter of academic material, but also in the field of skill development. Education is not just the absorption of knowledge. It is important to create an environment and a framework through which acquisition of knowledge and skills go hand in hand, thus empowering our young men and women to use that knowledge for productive activities. If we allow Distance Education to be used as an effective and alternative tool to formal education, the horizons of Distance Education and Open Educational Resources will expand exponentially.

The need for Distance Education is predicated on the premise that conventional teaching and learning methods cannot meet the challenges of our young population. We are perhaps, the youngest nation in the world, in the sense that more than 500 million people in our country are less than 25 years of age. By the year 2020, the average age of an Indian would be 29 years. We therefore, need enormous inputs to be able to provide both access and quality education to our young. This may not be possible by limiting ourselves to formal pedagogic methodologies.

Distance Education and Open Educational Resources will require use of technology. Today, we have technology to simulate lab experiments for Distance Learning. We have the technology to create virtual labs to allow our young to obtain hands-on experience for technical training and skill development. We need to invest in these technologies and develop new methodologies, which will enable us access to complex Educational Resources necessary for enhancing excellence in the field of Distance Education. The absence of adequate faculty, both at the school and at the university level can well be compensated not only through Distance Learning Programmes, but also through interactive teaching, where technology is an appropriate enabler. I might add that Distance Learning and Open Educational Resources are not just about earning Degrees or Diplomas through certification courses, but can and must cater to a large variety of data that can be accessed to provide necessary knowledge inputs to those who need them for earning their livelihood. In this context, income of our farmers can be enhanced through Distance Learning and Open Educational Resources. Preventive health care measures can be disseminated

through Distance Learning and data for symptoms and early warning of diseases can be accessed in this mode. Skilled workers can enhance their skills and those unskilled can acquire skills through Distance Learning. New languages can be learned; new methodologies adopted: all directed not just to the acquisition of knowledge, but directly related to livelihood. The linkage between learning and livelihood can best be provided through Distance Education.

As we advance technologically, the instruments that disseminate knowledge will also undergo change. Though the internet is a large resource pool, the cellphone can also be used both for dissemination as well as receipt of information, which helps learning with mobility. The use of airwaves, WiFi and new forms of technology will emerge, which will help and diversify the process of Distance Learning. What we need to do is not just expand Distance Learning through existing methodologies, but investigate, innovate and look for new solutions even in the area of Distance Learning. The ultimate goal of any civilized society is to provide choices to people. That is the hallmark of freedom. We must endeavour therefore, to enhance these choices in the field of education, not just in the area of curriculum, but also in allowing people access to disciplines, they might otherwise never have access to, but for Distance Education.

In the knowledge economy, enhancing the quality of Human Resource Development is directly related to economic growth. Any society which seeks the fruits of economic growth must invest in education. Our levels of literacy, which at present are a mere 64%,

must rise to above 90% in the near future, with particular emphasis to the disadvantaged groups including minorities and women. Because of the peculiar socio-economic milieu, in which our disadvantaged groups and women survive, it may not be possible for them to have access to formal schooling. Distance Learning allows the consumer of knowledge to have access to it without having to go to school. Methodologies must be developed to allow access to such consumers of knowledge, who without giving up their employment need to acquire and enhance their skills. Consumers of knowledge may wish to acquire multiple skills without having to go to universities. This also can be provided through Distance Education and Open Education Resources. At the heart of such an enterprise is the need of connectivity through Broadband. The true choices available through Distance Learning will only come about, if we are able to build the necessary infrastructure for connectivity. Along with that we must also start creating open source software to enable millions of our young people to acquire knowledge without having necessarily pay for it.

I strongly believe that open and distance learning will be an important element of future education and training systems. Its role in the creation of global knowledge-based societies is therefore decisive.

I would like to conclude by quoting Dr. Don Olcott Jr., Former President of US Distance Learning Association. He rightly remarked ***“In retrospect, distance education's long-term legacy will inextricably be tied to its capacity to empower and leverage educational access and opportunities for underserved populations who have been denied access due to diverse***

economic, social, political and/or cultural barriers. And this legacy and its manifestations transcend barriers across the globe among developed and developing countries and is interwoven among those aspiring ideals of human rights, equity, and equality for all to pursue their educational aspirations.!”

IGNOU as a pioneer in open and distance education has not only laid the foundation of this legacy, but has been a harbinger to the exponential growth of distance education in the country. Today, it is serving the educational aspirations of nearly 2 million students in India, especially from the disadvantaged and underserved population. IGNOU’s contribution towards national development and creating a global knowledge based society is significant.

I once again congratulate you all on the occasion of the University’s Silver Jubilee celebrations.