

**INAUGURAL ADDRESS AS CHIEF GUEST BY SMT.
D.PURANDESWARI MOS-HRD (HE) IN THE NATIONAL
ALUMNI MEET OF THE BANARAS HINDU UNIVERSITY ON
29TH JANUARY, 2009, AT VARANASI.**

Mr. D.P. Singh, Vice chancellor and other eminent and distinguished dignitaries and guests, it is a proud privilege for me to come here and join you in this National Alumni Meet of the Banaras Hindu University consisting of so many large number of its alumni members from diverse fields. I am indeed grateful to the authorities of BHU and organizers of the Alumni Association for inviting me to this meet.

I feel great to be present this morning at this University situated on the western bank of the holy river Ganga in the pious city of Varanasi known as the religious capital of India and also as a centre of Oriental Learning. The picturesque main campus of BHU is spread over 1300 acres of land with its majestic buildings of monumental architectural design, sprawling lush green fields and canopies of magnificent avenues, bearing testimony to the ingenuity and foresight of the founder.

Established by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviyaji in 1916 The Banaras Hindu University (BHU), is one of the most prestigious Universities in the country. An autonomous institution of distinction, having the Hon'ble President of India as its Visitor,

BHU is the largest residential University in Asia. Being a living embodiment of such visionaries as Malaviyaji, Dr. Annie Besant and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, this seat of learning epitomizes a synthesis of ancient wisdom and modern scientific temper. The holistic model of education, conceived and enriched by its illustrious founder, offers refreshingly new perspectives to young minds and nurtures and facilitates their creative talent. The university represents quintessence of religious and cultural thought of mother India through ages and its founder, esteemed Malaviyaji epitomizes the spirit of a noble and enlightened soul as described in the couplet from “Skanda Purana”, which reads....

न त्वहं कामये राज्यं न स्वर्गं नाऽपुनर्भवम्
कामये दुःखतप्तानां प्राणिनामार्तिनाशनम् ।

[I do not desire kingly or divine pleasures and comforts for myself nor do I yearn for personal salvation. My only mission is to serve the people who are afflicted by miseries in life.]

India today is passing through a phase which poses the danger of erosion to long accepted values. It appears that at one go humanity has been seized by those who believe that economic growth is the sole test of both development and power and lasting index of human happiness. Never before in human history has there been such a predicament when every thing is being measured in

terms of per capita income or GDP or the relative purchasing power or such other material considerations. This preoccupation on the part of the twentieth century man which has created a situation where family ties, inter-personal bonds, or cultural, ethical, and even religious and social considerations have been relegated to the background is really sending shock waves all around. Nobody seems to be worried about the manner in which all finer graces of human civilization have ceased to receive priority attention from those who control our lives. This has become a universal phenomenon and no society or country can feel that the situation is different with them. All what we hear is the talk about sharing of wealth, arms reduction and nuclear non-proliferation by those nations who produce all lethal weapons that could wipe out humanity several times over in the event of a war. Many of our leaders could foresee this development and warned us against it. Pt.Madan Mohan Malaviya's words that **“ a teaching University would but half perform its function if it does not seek to develop the heart power of its scholars with the same solicitude with which it would develop their brain power”** carry immense meaning and relevance today. In a similar vein India's illustrious philosopher statesman Dr.S.Radhakrishnan said *“Knowledge is not something to be packed away in some corner of our brain, but is what enters into our being, colour our emotion, haunts our soul and is as close to us a life itself. It is the over-mastering power,*

which through the intellect moulds the whole personality, trains the emotions and disciplines the will”.

Pt. Madan Mohan Malaviya could visualize the necessity of developing a system of education which would be at par with the best in the world in realizing the goal of industrial efficiency and economic progress. Thus he advocated not only universal primary education but also a system of sound technical education to enable India to find its rightful place among the nations. He considered that education, particularly higher education, was the sure guarantee of self reliance. This is of particular importance in view of the fact that the 21st Century is acknowledged by all as the “knowledge century”. India will have a distinct advantage in the next two decades because the size of its working population is likely to peak to 95 Crore in 2026. In order to reap this demographic dividend we must ensure that our work force acquires the necessary skills to support a knowledge economy.

There can be no doubt that higher education has made a significant contribution to the economic development and social equity in India. It has been instrumental in creating opportunities for our people and in fostering our vibrant democracy. Although its strengths are many, its weaknesses are also a cause for some concern. The malaise facing higher education in India has been described in some detail by the National Knowledge Commission in

its Note on Higher Education and it deserves serious consideration by our leaders and policy framers.

Malaviyaji believed that true education should equip the people to develop scientific and technical capabilities to the fullest extent without losing our Indian moorings. He shared with Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore the perception that education had its relevance and meaning only if it ensured freedom – freedom from ignorance and freedom from passion prejudices and pettiness. He believed that there were glittering elements in our diverse faiths and culture which would transcend all barriers and bind people in a common bond of togetherness as Indians. He said,-

“India is a country of the Hindus, the Muslims, the Christians and the Parsees. The country can gain strength and develop itself only when the people of the different communities in India live in mutual goodwill and harmony .It is my earnest hope and prayer that this centre of life and light which is coming into existence, will produce students who will be intellectually equal to the best of their fellow students in other parts of the world”.
Unquote.

During more than nine decades of its existence, the Benaras Hindu University has blossomed into an ever-growing, voluntary,

apolitical national institute with an international outlook, devoted to life, literature and culture. The University has made valuable contributions in extending the frontiers of knowledge in critical and crucial areas as also in the regeneration and efflorescence of community values as is well manifested through its alumni who form a great chain of distinguished personalities throughout the world occupying key positions in various professional domains. Endowed with a glorious history, BHU has played a stellar role in India's freedom movement and in post-independence learning and nation building. I am glad that the B.H.U. has thrown up great leaders, scientists, philanthropies and social workers and other eminent experts in various fields who have distinguished themselves in various fields of knowledge and professional excellence.

With these words, I wish that the Banaras Hindu University might, in keeping with its past traditions, continue to move to yet higher levels of excellence so that, as the poet prays, **“India might awake to that heaven of freedom where the mind is without fear and the head is held high”**.

Jai Hind.

