

Speech by

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President of the Republic of Mauritius at the IX Annual Convocation of KIIT
University

Bhubaneswar, Odisha

Saturday 16 November 2013 at 10 00 hours

Smt Saswati Bal, President of KIIT and KISS Dr. Achyuta Samanta, Founder and Mentor of KIIT and KISS Shri R. N. Dash, Secretary of KIIT and KISS Dr. N L Mitra, Chancellor of KIIT Professor P.P. Mathur, Vice-Chancellor, KIIT University Professor Oliver Smithies, Nobel Laureate Distinguished Members of the Executive KITT Society Distinguished Professors and Members of Faculties of the various Institutes under KITT Members of the Academia '. Dear Scholars .and Student's Ladies and Gentlemen All Protocol Duly Observed

My wife and I are deeply honoured and privileged to be amongst you today on this auspicious occasion of the IX Annual Convocation of Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology. Let me first reiterate, on behalf of the Government and people of Mauritius and in my own name, our heartfelt and sincere condolences for the loss of lives and our deepest feelings of sympathy for those who have lost their dear ones or their personal belongings and assets in the wake of Cyclone Phailin which recently struck the states of Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and other parts of India

I am fully alive to the extreme severity of Cyclone Phailin and the untold damage that it has caused to the lives of the people of Odisha, in particular. We are very much aggrieved by the number of people who lost their lives in that tragic event. Although one death is all too many, we are however relieved that the impact on human life has been masterly contained due to the preventive that measures were put in place ahead of the storm by the State Government of Odisha.

Indeed, the overwhelming mass evacuations, the first of its kind in the world ever, and the scientific precision of the forecasts and minute tracking of the storm have won world applause and speak highly of a resilient and technologically advanced and a caring incredible India. And here, I wish to salute the stewardship of Chief Minister Paitnaik and his Cabinet, and the competent authorities of Odisha and the relief workers for the bold and commendable pre and post cyclone emergency and humanitarian initiatives they took to minimize the effects of Cyclone Phailin. As reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts are ongoing, I wish to pay a special tribute to the population of Odisha and of all the affected areas in India for bearing such adversity with a great sense of fortitude. In Mauritius, we took a special interest in this natural climatic hazard, not because our country is also prone to tropical cyclones but more importantly, because our two countries share a common destiny.

If we in Mauritius watched with anguish the television coverage of the cyclone, it is also because of our deep and unbreakable attachment to this land and to this nation. Bharat remains, indeed, deeply rooted in our collective psyche in Mauritius. Moments of joy and distress in India are instinctively shared and felt in Mauritius with the same intensity and depth as fellow Indians. India is the land of our ancestors. I should say that my visit to Bhubaneswar was planned long before cyclone phailin, almost for over a year and a half, but I could not make it then in view of my other obligations. When this calamity struck, I had

thought of requesting a postponement of the visit. But that would have been inconsistent with the true spirit of friendship and the profound respect I have for this great country of yours, and which I have proudly inherited from my forefathers. So I told myself - we have to be together both in times of glee as much as in times of ordeal.

Here am I; to-day in your midst, to share with you your fortitude and your resilience in these trying times of the history of Odisha. And I must say, this has been, a very enriching human experience. I would like to express my sincere, gratitude to Dr Mahindra Prasad for having made our trip to Odisha possible. Indeed, he has' proved to be an excellent and tireless host.

The innate warmth that has pervaded our interactions with you all since our arrival in Odisha is also reflective of the special relations that bind our two countries for more than a century and a half. These relations," if explicable at all, are certainly founded on our shared cultural, linguistic, social, kinship and civilization experiences. Earlier this year, I had the immense privilege to visit my ancestral village of Bajidpur near Masaurhi, in Patna district, along with my wife. I was enthusiastically welcomed and offered soil of my ancestor's village.

This was a highly existential moment I will carry with me until the end. My great grandfather Lakshman Purryag sailed to Mauritius some 150 years ago to work as an indentured labourer. If I stand here in the presence of so many eminent personalities, especially, from the academia, I certainly owe it to the toil of my great grandfather and that of all those indentured labourers who were brought into the island of Mauritius during the latter half of the 19th Century.

It was the toil of painstakingly overcoming the challenges of life and its harshness in a new and distant land from where they never returned to their beloved India. You would understand, therefore, the sentiments of homage and pilgrimage that traverse my inner self whenever I visit India. It is with these feelings that I stand before you here in legendary Bhubaneswar, itself a renowned pilgrimage destination with its ancient temples, so dear to me personally, and to a great majority of my countrymen.

This city, packed with history and spiritualism, evokes in many of us the soul of an India which is time transcending. Ladies and Gentlemen Today, communications and commerce are global, technology is almost magical, and ambition for a better life is almost universal. Profound and powerful forces are shaking and remaking our world, and the urgent question of our time is whether we can change our friend and not our enemy, as change is the only constant in life. One of the most effective means to manage change meaningfully and without losing our inner soul is to my mind education. If I accepted the invitation of Dr. Achyuta Samanta, that is because I am very passionate about the subject of education. I value the benefits of education highly. For me, the first and last objective of life is education and nothing else but education. And man has emancipated himself from the laws of the jungle through education.

Here, in Bhubaneswar, I am sure many of us share a common belief in the supreme value of education as a central tool in the fight against poverty, the achievement of growth, and the empowerment of our citizens. As Sir Arthur Lewis from Saint Lucia and Nobel Laureate for Economics has said, and I quote: "The fundamental cure to poverty is not money, but education." (Unquote) Also, as rightly reflected in the inimitable words of Noble Prize winner Amartya Sen, "to build a country, build a schoolhouse". To

this, I would add what the great French writer Victor Hugo said: "He who opens a school door closes a prison.

‘Ladies and Gentlemen’

The case is. Overwhelming that investment in education and human capital are one of the most effective ways to the poor to achieve decent levels of income and health.

There is, indeed, powerful evidence that relates investments in education to employment and earnings, Health and mortality, fertility and family size, discrimination against girls in education, to name a few. As you know, our 'human capital is increasingly regarded as an engine of economic growth and for a more equitable and egalitarian society. But there is greater societal inequality when inequality is greater in education. Addressing such inequalities have been the driving forces which have underpinned the lifelong and commendable engagement of Dr. Achyuta Samanta, Founder and Mentor of the KIIT University. Here is a gentleman, fatherless at the age of four, who grew up in poverty with a widowed mother and who, thanks to his messianic vision and mission, has become a living archetype of social entrepreneurship and benevolence in the world. What a laudable achievement in this modern and competitive world of ours where beating thy neighbor and self-interest motivate the individual and the state!

At a time where education for some is becoming a business, an industry to mint money; the life and achievements of Dr. Achyuta Samanta should be an example for all of us to emulate. I cannot say it better than H. E. Mr. Hamid Ansari, Vice President of India who stated [QUOTE] "In one of India's least developed states, more than 20,000 tribal students are being tutored, free of cost, in the ways of the modern world. The force behind the movement, educationist Dr. Achyuta Samanta and founder of Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS), who firmly believes that what you sow, is what you reap. Dr. Samanta has demonstrated that if one has passion, to do something for society, a lot can be done. The work that he has done has only a few parallels in the whole world" [UNQUOTE]. Human empowerment, change agents, all-round development, preservation and enhancement of tribal heritage, tolerance, forbearance, equity, poverty eradication and above all livelihood, sustainability and human dignity are all central to Dr Samanta's work. "What more?" I am tempted to ask.

Dr. Samanta embodies the Hindu notion of Seva, or service to humanity. No wonder why he has been deservedly bestowed with so many national and international prizes and has been hailed as fulfilling Gandhiji's vision of educating tribal children who have legitimate development aspirations and human rights as do all children in the world. It was John Dewey who said that "Education is not a preparation for life. It is life itself." My visit to KIIT has certainly re-confirmed this powerful adage.. Dr. Samanta, through his commendable and unique educational social welfare programmes, is giving life and hope to 29,000 tribal children of India. Throughout its history, India has been blessed with legendary sages, with selfless men and women who were ahead of their times and who devoted their lives relentlessly to the cause of the Indian people. Dr. Samanta is, undoubtedly, one of them. He is a born leader and a wise man of our times. I am tempted to parody Shakespeare by saying "There was a man. When cometh such another?"

Ladies and Gentlemen

The battle of today is against poverty, against discrimination, against hunger and malnutrition, against deprivation, against climate change, against imbalances, and excesses of market forces, against people's uncertainties and insecurities, against marginalization, against a suffocating globalization model which generates inequality and tension and is in many ways morally unacceptable and politically unsustainable. The lofty values and principles instilled by the Mahabharata such as resilience, tenacity,

fortitude, resolve, determination, patience are imperative as we seek to win this battle which, in essence, remains the epic battle between the good and the evil. To win this battle would also require all of us to change our mindsets and consider the world as one global society. I am pleased that KIIT, as an internationally renowned centre of excellence, is contributing to bringing such new mindsets change in its students.

At a time when problems are interconnected, I commend the youthful energy and academic rigour with which this University is responding to the issues and challenges of the times in many innovative ways, notably, through interdisciplinary learning, entwining technology, the environment, arts and social sciences. In today's globalized world, we are being daily inundated by tetrabytes of information, analyses- most of the times one contradicting the other, and multitude of national and international events unfolding live by the minute on broadcast and internet channels. The influx of data and information compels us decision makers, whether in business or in government, and in our daily lives to take compelling choices and paths. Against a background of looming global economic crisis and climate change, what are these choices for a government and nation? While opinions may differ on such choices, I strongly believe that we must ensure that the policies we take also open up avenues for greater social justice, with greater respect for human dignity, the environment and the needs of sustainable development.

For instance, finance should be at the service of the economy, not the reverse. We should, indeed, build on the positive gains of competition through innovation and efficiency and guard against the negative effects of destructive competition and liberalization. It would be, indeed, wrong, and even dangerous, to concentrate only on macro-economics to refloat the economy and recover some levels of previous growth, and then go back to business as usual and allow the greed of a small minority to continue indulging in speculative acts that irresponsible deregulation breeds and that ultimately undermines the real economy. To do so would mean being oblivious to the social dimensions of the global crises which poor families and communities did not create but of which they bear the highest human costs. To do so would also mean turning a blind eye to the consequences of climate change and irresponsible use of resources which sustain our future and that of the coming generations. In the face of these crises, we need, therefore, to ensure a productive recovery through the promotion of sustainable economic activities.

To this end, we need to craft policies which stimulate a greening of production and consumption through new technology and clean energy approaches. I am pleased that" the KIIT integrates such multi-layer thinking in imparting knowledge, blending humanism and modernism, making it a university for life. . This institution is indeed one of the foundations of the future. Establishing such a centre of high learning demonstrates the capacity of the human spirit and intellect for regeneration and transformation while keeping alive this legacy. It also reflects the spirit which animates a rising Odisha. This State, reputed for its green revolution, is, indeed, thriving on agriculture, industry, entrepreneurship, education and academia. These are key ingredients of development, and I would like to pay my tribute to the leadership of Odisha.

In this rising State of Odisha, reflecting a rising global India, and in this prestigious academic institution, it is a great honour for me to be conferred a Doctorate Honoris Causa. I would like to deeply thank KIIT, in particular Dr. Achyuta Samanta and all persons associated with this award which I accept with great

humility. This honour bestowed upon my humble person is yet another recognition of the unique bond that unites Mauritius and India. I dedicate this distinction to the people of Mauritius and to the unbreakable friendship between our two countries. In so doing, I, will continue-to be guided by the spiritual tenets of the holy Indian scriptures that have bequeathed to humanity. They have taught me, just as Dr. Samanta does, that the only action that is worth fighting for is the one that delivers on social justice. and peace, within a country and amongst countries. Yesterday, while addressing the students of KIIS, I said I would be your global Ambassador.

To-day, I am reiterating what I said yesterday. You can trust me for disseminating and helping uphold the lofty ideals that underpin your prestigious and noble institutions. We came. We saw. We have been conquered. We will certainly carry back with us very sweet memories of our stay in Bhubaneswar. In conclusion, let me share with you these words of wisdom that constitute the Essence of the Geeta and I quote: "The past was pleasant. The present is undoubtedly sweet. .. And the future -will definitely be splendid. You have lost nothing of yours and why do you lament? You have brought nothing. So there is no loss. You have created nothing. And hence no wastage. What you have taken, is taken from here. What you have given, is given from here only. What is yours to-day will belong to others to-morrow.

And the next day, it will pass on to others. The inevitable change is the law of the universe. JJ [Unquote]
With these words, I thank you again for the very warm hospitality that you have extended to us since our arrival.

May God Bless you all!

Bandhe Outkal Janani!

Jai Mauritius!

Jai Hind!