

SPEECH ON THE OCCASSION OF THE GOLDEN JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS OF GARGI COLLEGE

I would first like to congratulate the Governing Body, the Principal, the staff and the students of Gargi College on the celebration of its Golden Jubilee. Gold has been the standard of exemplary purity and excellence since time immemorial and I am very happy to be a part of this milestone of Gargi College. This college, instituted in 1967, provided opportunities to young women who wanted to enter the professional arena and participate as equals in the nation building project envisioned by our Founding Fathers. It is indeed a matter of satisfaction that Gargi College has successfully striven for the empowerment of young women for the last fifty years whether it was in the field of academics, co-scholastic enrichment or sports.

Dear Students,

2. A college is much more than the bricks and mortar with which it is built. A college is its people. From the humblest to the highest functionary and the generations of students and teachers who make it into a thriving institution.

3. Today, I would like to share with you my vision and hopes for the young generation of our nation. **Sarve sukhino bhavantu**, (may all people be happy) should be the driving impulse of any conception of education in any period or place. It is important to recall that the singular feature of '**vidya dana**' (the act of imparting knowledge) that this country expounded was aimed at attaining happiness for everyone. No doubt we want economic growth, we want technological development, we want scientific pursuit of knowledge; but at the end, everything comes to a point that we want to have happiness – happiness of the people, happiness by the people and happiness for the people; irrespective of artificial divisions of race, caste, class and gender.

4. As we strive for success and riches and fulfilment, we have to remember that we cannot achieve any of it by living in a bubble of self-interest, for we are a part of humanity and until everyone progresses and has the opportunity to fulfil their potential and transform their dreams into reality, our goals will only be mirages. For these mirages to become oasis, we need to not only work hard and dream big, but also strive to use our research capability to

innovatively address the real problems that our nation faces.

5. Those students who are entering the workforce must be self-managing, self-developing and emotionally self-sustaining. I would also like to caution you against the exploitation of “fault lines” in the society, intolerance and gender violence. I have always believed that there is room for ‘argumentative Indian’ but no room for ‘intolerant Indian’. Our nation is a bastion of free thought, speech and expression since ancient times. Our society has always been characterised by the open contestation of diverse schools of thought and debate as well as discussion and respect for individual differences. Freedom of speech and expression is one of the most important fundamental rights guaranteed by our constitution. You must cultivate and practice and demand the freedom to criticise and dissent, not only within college but in every sphere of your lives, today and for all the tomorrows that you will be a part of. I wish that you graduate not only with good marks and the promise of gainful and satisfying employment, but also with self-confidence. The courage of your convictions should be your true worth as you chart your destiny.

6. To all the teachers in this auditorium I would like to say that you are the proud inheritors and flag bearers of a wonderful tradition of being in the fortunate position to give your students the greatest gift of all, the gift of knowledge. Sustaining and reinvigorating higher education has become a major challenge, especially in public institutions. Challenges exist for such institutions, both from outside and inside. According to me, four such factors are –

- escalation of costs of learning;
- narrow pragmatics, i.e. market-oriented fast track skill acquisition as the sole goal of learning;
- the allure of invasive dominant communication systems depleting attention spans, and
- Corrosion of trust.

7. An institution's future is dependent on enabling the faculty, students and the staff to overcome cynicism. Cynicism is an easy alibi to evade responsibility. One way of achieving this is by making everyone a stakeholder in collaborative institution building. Wherever Lord Buddha traversed – seeds of knowledge sprouted and flourished. Nalanda, Takshashila, Vikramashila are held the beacon of light

very high for over a millennium across lands and seas and welcomed drifting seekers of knowledge and provided them a lasting resting place. India led the international community in the area of higher learning. In less than 10 years from now, nearly 140 million people will be in the college-going age group. Every fourth graduate in the world will be a product of our higher education system. In such a competitive environment, only those professionals who are properly skilled and trained will achieve success. The onus is on the higher educational institutions, especially on the teachers, to prepare their students in a way that they are globally relevant and yet sensitive to the needs of the society they inhabit.

8. Transforming our institutions of higher learning into centres of excellence is the key challenge policy-makers and academic leaders face. An important necessity of modern Universities is to have a reservoir of inspired teachers who can ignite the minds of students and encourage them to think out-of-the box. With ever-evolving techniques in education, traditional teaching will not suffice.

9. Millennial children grow up in a world filled with complexities, a world that has become increasingly challenging – socially, emotionally and technologically. Thus, the teaching community should not be left behind in the ‘race of time’. Just like their learners, the teachers, too, learn new lessons every single day. A teacher who is introspective and in tandem with the changing scenario will be able to relate better to the needs of the children of this time and age.

10. Teaching and learning is a lifelong process that the educators and learners tread together. Today’s teaching fraternity has to portray a ‘posse’ of roles – a facilitator, a counsellor, a friend, a parent and many more. When a teacher says that she has gained vast experience in the line of teaching, it is by virtue of her students. No teacher can undermine the influence of her students in the progress of her own career.

Students,

11. Your college takes its name from the Vedic scholar who has become immortal for all that she stood for – challenging prevailing norms and inhibitions, fearless enquiry and a relentless search for answers. I would like to see this legacy

receive continuous nurturing in the form of innovations and opportunities for all the stakeholders of the college – the students, the teachers, the staff and the administrators, who will then be able to work in collaboration to achieve the synergy of excellence and empowerment that are the hallmarks of any great institution. Some of the areas that you might want to focus on are inequality and the environment so that the world becomes a better place and you have the satisfaction of knowing that you have made a contribution to it and created a legacy that will endure and flourish.

12. I once again congratulate you all on reaching this Golden Jubilee Milestone. May you continue to flourish for all times to come.

Thank You

Jai Hind