



2nd
Convocation
2009

Report of the
Vice-Chancellor

2 May 2009

Good Morning. His Excellency Shri Murlidhar Chandrakant Bhandare, Governor of Orissa and the Chancellor of Ravenshaw University, Dr. Arijit Pasayat, Hon'ble Judge, Supreme Court of India, our esteemed Chief Guest, our distinguished recipients of degrees honoris causa, Hon members of the Executive Committee, Senate and Academic Council of the Ravenshaw University, the Deans of Schools and Faculties, Graduates of the Class of 2008, fellow Ravenshavians and invitees.

On behalf of the Ravenshaw University, I welcome you all to our rejoicing on this bright summer day, almost scorching with white heat. It was in the same killing field of May last year, on May 10 to be precise, that the Ravenshaw University had celebrated its first annual convocation. Our Chief Guest on that occasion was Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, former President of the Indian Republic, who delivered the commencement speech. He treated the vapid coastal heat with characteristic disdain, and engaged the students in mind building for the future.

I recall how he quoted Sir C.V. Raman, who at the age of 82 was the emblem of India's indomitable spirit. Sir C.V. Raman had said 'I can assert without fear of contradiction that the quality of Indian mind is equal of the Teutonic, Nordic or Anglo-Saxon mind. What we lack perhaps is courage.'

We have today, on the occasion of our second annual convocation, another person of substance as the Chief Guest. Hon'ble Dr. Arijit

Pasayat, whose judicial courage and competence in discharging the arduous duties of the Supreme Court is well known, and in whose judgments cogency of mind blends with elegant language, is a Ravenshavian. He has so graciously accepted our invitation in the very last week of his office.

This is also my opportunity to recognize the invaluable mentoring of His Excellency Shri Murlidhar Chandrakant Bhandare, Governor of the State, who is the main architect of the proceedings of today as the Chancellor of the University.

The grand old Ravenshaw College was 138 years of age when it was converted to University by a State Act in November 2006. For all of us in Ravenshaw, it is an unbroken journey since 1868, when a small incipient colonial college was conceived in the rural township of Cuttack sans electricity and macadamized roads, with a strength of six freshmen. Over the years, it grew into an institution whose history is synonymous with the history of modern Orissa. Therefore, the *raison d'être* of our current existence has been to conserve this rich heritage as much as we change. Our effort is to cope with contemporaneity and validate change within this effort.

The Ravenshaw graduates of yesteryears had their degrees conferred, for historical reasons, from Calcutta and Patna Universities, as well as from Utkal University for a long stretch of 60 years. Last year, for the first time Ravenshaw University conferred its own degree, and today the second batch of Ravenshavians, about 2100 students

from undergraduate, postgraduate and M.Phil courses, will walk through the hallowed portals of this premier institution of learning, to enter a life of adult responsibilities. I am assuming, of course that while leaving you are taking something of this institution with you (apart from unreturned library books!).

On the question of what you take and leave, I remember reading somewhere how an Oxford Don boasted that Oxford being Oxford, all freshmen who entered were required to bring some learning with them in order to meet the standards of admission. No senior however (sighed the Don!) when he left, ever took any learning away, and so the learning steadily accumulated. Ravenshaw was once regarded as the Cambridge of Orissa, perhaps more because of its majestic infrastructure, and yet in no small measure by its scholarship in its exalted years. I will feel concerned not about what you leave behind, but what you take with you, and what you contribute to society.

The evolution of Ravenshaw has been phenomenal compared to its embryonic days. From six students and the local Chaplain as a part time faculty, it has reached a strength of about 5000 students with 150 teaching positions. From the days when the teacher used to show a pencil to proxy for a non-existent thermometer in the class, it has now a campus with Wi Fi IT infrastructure, and a system of online admission. It has adopted the new age semester system. It has configured 11 Schools and 4 Centres as well as faculty-driven academic governance through the Council of Deans.

The travails of growth, on the other hand, have only hardened. We might have made our front yard a little cleaner but that is only cosmetic. The back yard of old baggage is still not sorted out. We are only restoring the form hoping that the form will eventually determine its content. The realities however often defy such epigrams.

It is easy to get land and money but tough to get faculty, and even tougher to cultivate the university culture. Our teacher-student ratio is still woefully large. There is no full proof quality check of what we teach and whom we teach. There is no internal evaluation of faculty performance in teaching and research. The new Schools and Centres are waiting to be made really functional. Libraries are still to remain open for 24 hours, and computers as a classroom tool are still to take root. The flexibility and eclecticism of a modern day syllabi are still wanting. Our maiden management programme in the Ravenshaw Management Centre (RMC) may face rough weather even before it sails, in the economic meltdown.

What we have done is little, what we still have to do is countless. We can only assure you that we are at it. As they say, when the going is tough, the tough gets going. I take comfort from the metaphor in Subroto Bagchi's speech on the campus - 'A Burden of Dreams' - where Ravenshaw University appears as a pregnant women carrying the burden of her child with loving care, yet not without its trials.

There have also been blessings and prizes. The RMC in collaboration with XIMB has advertised for the second batch of MBA.

Grants from central ministries have been received to make the campus barrier free, and to set up a School of Hospitality and Hotel Management. The Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR) has its Regional Centre for Orissa set up inside the Ravenshaw campus. A UGC grant has been received for major reorientation of Kanika Library. The homework of the first digital music library for the School of Contemporary Music is nearly complete. A number of lecture halls are being modernized with multimedia resources. The transmission tower of the Ravenshaw FM Radio has been installed. The Ravenshaw Convention Centre with State of the Art facilities is in the final stage at the drawing board. The renovated Amphitheatre shall have space for 1500 persons, and a large Coffee House. The Ravenshaw College Hall, now modernized with all heritage elements intact, shall emit a new radiance when it opens in a couple of months. The recruitment of faculty has now crossed the penultimate stage of short-listing. The UGC visiting team has recommend a substantial amount for the growth of the Second Campus.

For over a century, Ravenshaw was the exclusive knowledge centre of the State. The majority of its products, from Pandit Gopabandhu Dash to Biju Patnaik were statesman and nation builders. Many were pursuers of pure scholarship, from Physics to Metaphysics. Dr. Bhakta Bandhu Rath and Prof. Jitendra Nath Mohanty, who recently visited us, are only two of a myriad of such instances. Despite years of decline, Ravenshaw is indeed a scared place. Every Ravenshavian even today, including the young graduates in gown

and stole have genetic propensity to excel. The question is, are you willing to be the chosen one?

It is a little unnerving when most students these days say that they study for bureaucratic or corporate jobs, exhibiting an entirely utilitarian view of education. Times have changed, but many Ravenshavians in the past had political careers. Many of them were also the ablest and most versatile. The majority of Chief Ministers of the State have been Ravenshavians. We look upon the fresh graduates of today not as a group of job seekers but as leaders of men who can give to the world the broadest possible benefits of their education. Bismarck, speaking of the students of German Universities, once said that one third of them broke down from overwork, another one third from dissipation, and the other third ruled Germany. I shall be content if one fourth of Ravenshavians achieve that destiny.

With the formation of the University, Ravenshaw has been blessed with a steady flow of esteemed visitors. We had in the course of last two years, visits of several luminaries including Subroto Bagchi, Jean Dreze, Andre Beteille, Lord Meghanad Desai and Prasanta Patnaik amongst several others. It is gratifying to have amongst us today, a galaxy of achievers, on whom the Ravenshaw University feels privileged to confer degrees honoris causa in recognition of their eminence. We have Mr. Anil B. Divan, the legal luminary, Madam Kishori Amonkar, the music genius, Mr. Jayanta Mahapatra, our beloved poet from Cuttack, Dr. Prabhat Patnaik the distinguished economist whose initial Ph.D. was earned from the Cambridge

University, and who hails from a family of well known Ravenshavians, and last but not the least, Dr. Trilochan Pradhan, founder of the Institute of Physics and an ardent Ravenshavian. Their presence, and familiarity with their work and achievement, will greatly enhance the exposure of the young Ravenshavians.

The English Prime Minister Winston Churchill was once invited to make a commencement speech at Harrow, which was his school where years earlier he had almost flunked. He said only three words, 'never give up'. He paused and said, 'never give up'. He paused further and said again 'never give up', and sat down. So, 'never give up'.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dadas Chhetri". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Vice Chancellor