The Governor's Speech

Address by Shri K Sankaranarayanan, Governor of Maharashtra at the Graduation Ceremony of the Arts students on 13 June 2013.

Dear Students,

The single most comparative advantage which India enjoys over others is our youthful population. This demographic dividend can be availed by India only if we could encourage and involve our youths in the task of nation building.

As an emerging power, India is going to need Engineers, technocrats, business managers and a large pool of skilled people to power our economy and the needs of our growing manufacturing sector.

The Hon’ble Prime Minister of India has announced an ambitious programme of skilling 50 million people by the year 2022.

However, I wish to remind you that apart from engineers, professionals and other skilled people, our society is also going to need social scientists, lawyers, political scientists, linguists, sociologists, anthropologists, historians, communication professionals and others to address its core problems in a holistic manner.

This is where your role, as graduates of Arts and Humanities will assume importance and significance.

I was going through the outcomes of a Global Survey of Higher Education and ranking of World Universities in the field of Arts and Humanities.

Out of the 50 top institutions in the area of Arts and Humanities, 25 universities are in the United States, 10 are in the United Kingdom and the rest are in Australia, Germany and other countries. There was one University each from Hong Kong and Singapore figuring in the list. None of our universities figures anywhere in the list.

That brings me to the point I wish to make today. We are attaching very little importance to the field of arts and humanities. This neglect of arts and humanities has been manifesting in so many ways.

For instance, it has adversely affected the quality of intellectual debate and discussion in our country. It has affected the quality of research and literature that we produce. Lack of attention to humanities has had adverse impact on the quality and availability of teachers. Outcomes of arts and humanities cannot be quantified, but we cannot have all round development of a society without humanities.

Without humanities, a society will not have a strong framework of values. Without Humanities, we will not make a holistic society. Without Humanities, we will not be able to address the core problems of our society including poverty, regional imbalance, inequality, etc.

Today few students are opting for pure sciences. Still fewer are going for Humanities and Social Sciences. We have to bring the best and brightest students to Arts and humanities and I am happy that St. Xavier’s is doing precisely the same.

As Governor of Maharashtra, I have the responsibility towards the development of backward regions of the State. This role exposed me to the problem of regional disparities and that of lack of opportunities in education and in employment to people living in the backward regions of the State. It also brought to my notice the problem of poverty and malnutrition.

Globalization has done immense good to our economy, but it has also increased the rich-poor divide. The problems of traditionally disadvantaged – people like the tribals, the scheduled castes, the nomadic tribes and others have aggravated. We cannot address these issues merely by pumping funds and resources. We can address these issues only through the paradigm of humanities and social sciences.

Today we need a generation of scholars specialising in social sciences. They can help us frame better policies for socio-economic change. They can guide us to improve human development indicators of backward districts. They can guide us on how to improve the
socio-economic conditions of the poor, the backward classes, the minorities and others.

St. Xavier's is one of the finest and reputed institutions of Arts and Humanities not only in Maharashtra, but in the entire country. I want it to become one of the best in Asia and perhaps one of the best in the world. I urge the Institute to work closely with governments and policy makers and provide its valuable inputs from time to time. I call upon all the graduating students to take interest in the affairs of the State and the nation and to become agents of social change.

With this hope and appeal, I congratulate the graduating students of St. Xavier's and wish them a bright future. I also wish St. Xavier's, its Principal and members of the faculty and staff Godspeed in their future endeavours.

Thank you.

Autonomy: The first cycle

While one enters the portals of St. Xavier's one cannot help noticing the presence of the sentinels of time who have guarded this great institution for over a hundred years. Here, Autonomy has always been 'a way of life'. In 2010, however Autonomy was embraced formally. Our nomenclature changed. From St. Xavier's College, we were transformed into St. Xavier's College (Autonomous).

There was a sense of trepidation about the new status. It was more than merely a change in nomenclature. It certainly changed the work-culture of the teaching-learning process. Both students and the teachers were on their toes – alert, dynamic, agile, flexible. The adjectives could continue. It has been three years since our Autonomous status. In June, 2013 our first batch of eaglets began their ascent towards the skies. They graduated. We were proud and humbled simultaneously. At this juncture, it is worthwhile to examine what makes the Autonomous-Xavier's a force to reckon with. It would be honest to acknowledge that we have made mistakes too, but like the proverbial phoenix we rose from the ashes to surmount our problems and carry on the journeying.

With Autonomy, the floodgates to freedom opened. This was experienced in the construction of our syllabi-a product of brainstorming and thought-provoking deliberations. The brainchild was the outcome of insights thought-provoking deliberations. The product of brainstorming and in the construction of our syllabi—a freedom opened. This was experienced by the Board of Studies comprising the very best of academia and industry alongside members of the in-house faculty and student representatives. With this process, innovative courses/practicals were charted thus adding greater gusto to the academic environment. The contents of our syllabi encourage critical thinking and evoke fruitful interactions in the classroom.

The teaching - learning activity has acquired a new dimension. The Bloom's Taxonomy is applied systematically so as to encourage the higher order skills of critical thinking and creativity. The teacher dons the mantle of a facilitator and thus 'guides' the students towards the understanding of the course. The student on the other hand, is expected to engage in library work and references to build a perspective on the topic discussed. The infrastructure facilities developed through the funding due to autonomy add magic to the process of teaching-learning. Besides 'chalk and talk', improved laboratory facilities, audio-visual equipped classrooms, smoother internet access, use of Moodle etc contribute to the joy of learning and teaching. The projects, assignments and presentations given to students are designed with a view to enhance their creative and critical faculties. The objectives enable original thinking and sincere action.

Autonomy allowed for flexibility in the courses offered. The cross-disciplinary courses have been the 'jewels in our crown'; our pride. The inter-disciplinary approach has led to a viable cross-fertilization between various subjects, for instance the Humanities offer courses to the Science sections and vice-versa. The cross-faculty courses have been extremely enriching and fulfilling. The Social Involvement Programme (SIP), the Special Course comprising Environmental Studies and Giving Voice to Values, an erstwhile requirement for the Arts and Sciences were extended to the Self-financing courses in the Autonomous system. This exposure to the rigours of society was meant to develop an insight into a world on the other side of the spectrum. The Social Service League (SSL) is another venture on campus - established for the good of society and the students. One has only to witness the labyrinth of action in the SSL to believe the enormity and dynamism of this social movement. The freedom to interact with the faculty and students of different streams during the cross-faculty courses, the SIP and SSL has only added to the richness of our experience!

We adopted the semester system and to level the ground for all subjects, we chose the Grade Point Average (GPA) to reflect the students' performance. In the Autonomous system, the multidimensional skills of the students are tested through creative and insightful questions. Our question papers bear the stamp of the Bloom's Taxonomy of learning. The continuous assessments have honed the alertness of our students. Amidst all these, transparency has been our greatest virtue. The marking grids, moderation, the double-blind corrections and the display of answer papers to students have reinforced full faith in the evaluating mechanism. These quality-measures highlighted our sense of fair play and the desire to avoid any anomalies.

This concept of justice percolated into Malhar, our college-festival as well which used the concept of transparent score sheets. The scores were made public and the Contingent Leaders from different colleges were allowed
to check how the judges had marked them for any event dispelling even the slightest doubts about rigged results. This enhanced the image of Malhar within the student community. The participation at extra-curricular activities did not entail shirking academic responsibilities. Come Malhar or Paradigm or Ithaka, the paradox was - you could not skip lectures for these but at the same time, you had to be a part of some programme or the other. Despite the continuous internal assessments, the extra-curricular arena remained active as ever.

Research is another important aspect of Autonomy. Where would an educational institution be without a thirst for knowledge and the zest to contribute effectively to the existing reservoir of information? Research is the order of the day. It is encouraged whole-heartedly since only an active mind can be a productive pedagogical mind. The spirit of research brings with it a host of other qualities: perseverance, single-minded devotion, the desire to add a fresh perspective and the like. The teaching and the learning community are encouraged to engage in research.

One could write reams and reams on Autonomy. It suffices to say that we have come a long way in our journey. However, resting on our laurels alone would be unhealthy. We have encountered various impediments, learned many lessons through experimentation - trial and error. Like Janus, the Roman God we ought to look at our past and the future while we work to create our 'present'. Our human errors so far should guide us to try and forge a new future. Freedom comes with responsibilities and it is our responsibility to carve out a new educational model in and through Autonomy.

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Hearty Congratulations to the Commerce section on completing twenty-years of fruitful and dedicated service to society!

It is with a deep sense of gratitude that the Late Fr. Valero Aleu S.J is remembered for his pivotal role in the development of the commerce section. Fr. Errol S.J, the Vice-Principal of the Commerce section continues his inspirational legacy by motivating the students. Kudos to the faculty and the non-teaching staff who have contributed immensely to the growth of the Commerce Section. The students of this evening section deserve a special mention because of their undying spirit to excel and reach great heights.