



## Guest of Honour

2<sup>nd</sup> Convocation of St. Xavier's University, Kolkata

### **Prof. Dr. Sanghamitra Bandyopadhyay**

Director, Indian Statistical Institute (ISI)

Prof. Dr. Sanghamitra Bandyopadhyay, Director, Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) is one of the most eminent computer scientists in India. She started her career as a faculty member in the Machine Intelligence Unit of ISI in 1999. She is the first woman Director of ISI from 2015. Her area of specialization is computational biology and, she has worked with many Institutions, Universities, Academic Sector etc in different parts of the world such as USA, France, China, Italy, Australia, Germany, Mexico etc. At present, she is also the senior professor at the Machine Intelligence Unit of ISI, Kolkata.

Prof. Sanghamitra Bandyopadhyay obtained her bachelor degree from Presidency College, Kolkata in Physics. She also obtained another degree in Computer Science (B.Tech) in 1992 from Rajabazar Science College, University of Calcutta. She did her master's degree (M.Tech) in Computer Science from the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur. She obtained her Ph. D. from the Indian Statistical Institute in 1998.

In her academic career she received many awards and fellowships. She was the recipient of the prestigious Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Prize in Engineering Science in 2010 awarded by Government of India. Among many other awards, she received the Infosys Prize in 2017, TWAS Prize, DBT National Women Bioscientist Award (Young), INAE Silver Jubilee Prize, Young scientist/engineer medals of INSA, INAE and Science Congress, JC Bose Fellowship, Swarnajayanti Fellowship and Humboldt Fellowship.

She is a senior Associate of ICTP and Fellow of INSA, INAE, NASI and IEEE. She is a member of the Prime Ministers' Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council. She has published over 3000 research article including international/ National journals, author/Co-author of many books in many eminent publishers such as Springer, World Scientific and Wiley etc. Her special interests are in the areas of soft computing, data mining, and bioinformatics, computational biology and bioinformatics, soft and evolutionary computation, pattern recognition and data mining.

She has kindly agreed to deliver the 2<sup>nd</sup> Convocation Address at the St. Xavier's University, Kolkata on the theme "**The Leadership Role of University Students in India Today**".

## **Convocation Address**

February 06, 2021

Hon'ble Governor of West Bengal, Shri Jagdeep Dhankhar, Vice-Chancellor Father Felix Raj, dignitaries on and off the dais, faculty members, staff members, guests, my very dear students, ladies and gentlemen. It is a great pleasure and honour for me to be amongst you today, on one of the most important occasions of any academic institute – its Convocation. This is a young University, a little more than three years old, yet it carries a deep history in its name. The name of St Xavier's commands great respect in academia, and expectations are automatically higher. When St. Xavier's University was formed in 2017, we all took note, and have keenly followed its growth. I had a special interest since this University from its inception has been led by Father Felix Raj, whom I got to know very well when both of us served in the West Bengal Education Commission. I know that in Father Raj, this University has a great leader and administrator, and so I have high hopes for this institution.

Dear Students, I am so very happy to be with you on a day that you will cherish for many years to come. My heartiest congratulations to you for having worked really hard to earn the degrees that will be conferred on you today. A day when you are ready to step out into this world with the most potent weapons that anyone can have. The weapons of education, of knowledge and of confidence imparted to you so painstakingly by your teachers and your parents. Use these weapons wisely and for the benefit of the society. You need to remember that you are a product of the 'St. Xavier's University'. In everything you do, you have to really prove yourselves worthy of your alma mater.

Most great work around the world has been done in Universities. India had some of the oldest Universities in the world. Taxila, a seat of higher learning in ancient India was established several hundred years BC. Famous names are associated with Taxila – Charaka, the father of medicine; Panini, the grammarian; Chanakya, the pioneer political scientist and economist; and Chandragupta Maurya, his protege. Nalanda University was founded much later, and flourished between the 5<sup>th</sup> century and 12<sup>th</sup> century AD. It had a truly modern outlook and structure, with students from far and wide including from China, Tibet and Korea, studying there. It was towards the end of this period that some top Universities were established in Europe like the Universities of Bologna, Oxford, Cambridge, Paris and Padova. Gradually the European Universities gained in prominence. Later on, excellent Universities, both public and private, were established, primarily in the US. Unfortunately, the University system in India saw a gradual decline over the years for a variety of reasons, including the misplaced notion that while Universities need to primarily carry out teaching activities, high quality research would be the forte of some specialized institutions. This, despite the fact that some of the best

researches, world-wide have often been done in the Universities, and excellent leaders have often come out of the top ones. This is not surprising at all, I must say. Only when the world-view is broad and a confluence of ideas happen, does great work get done and great characters are built. And where else, but in a University will you find the right setting?

Friends, today we are going through a very tough time. A minuscule virus has shaken the entire world, and exposed once again the vulnerability of humans against nature. Lives and livelihoods have been lost and economies around the world have taken a tumble. It is also during these trying times that we saw the scientific community of the entire world come together for a common cause. The pandemic has once again taught us the importance of self-reliance as a nation in all aspects. And it is my firm belief that a country whose education system imparts strong values, whose knowledge is deep, whose vision is broad and whose mind is free will emerge a winner. Even in the education commission report we had insisted on value-based education from the primary level. A society built on strong foundations of integrity, honesty, ethics and a sense of service is bound to remain great. Imbibe these fundamental values in whatever you do. A University like yours leads by example in this, so do not let it down.

Today India needs high calibre academic leaders and Institution-builders to propel the country on an upward trajectory. And it is here that I have very high hopes from all of you. The important challenges that the education system of the country faces is a deficiency in high quality knowledge generation, insufficient level of innovation, and a failure to convert knowledge into wealth. Universities like yours will play a major role in rectifying these lacunae by building the leaders and the policy-makers of tomorrow. Education policy-makers and Institutional leaders have to recognize the importance of academic freedom and the fallacies of regimenting knowledge, of having too many regulations, and of too much reliance on policy. A good policy is one which is invisible, and which also trusts its leaders. In turn, trust is built only where integrity of character is a rule rather than an exception. Today I find a remarkable lack of trust in the leaders but I have high hopes that the churn that is happening in our education system will bring us out of this abyss.

Yes, times are trying, and challenges are many. Therefore, opportunities are immense and possibilities are endless. I believe that from amongst you, leaders of tomorrow will emerge. So do not be afraid to experiment, to go beyond what you think you are capable of. To quote Sir Arthur C. Clarke, "The only way of finding the limit of the possible is by going beyond them into the impossible." Remember, if you try you may fail, if you do not try you have already failed. Keep in mind also that today there is no place for mediocrity - but mediocrity in what? Mediocrity in effort. Today there are so many possibilities, so many options to choose from,

and so many ways to turn your life. Each way can take you to the top, but all these possibilities demand commitment, dedication and hard work. It is on these characteristics that you cannot afford to be mediocre – give your very best effort to whatever you do, and you will see that avenues will open up. Indeed, the harder you work, the luckier you get. Life will throw you unexpected challenges, but behind every challenge, lies an opportunity if you just care to look for it. And these are not mere words, my friends. I have experienced it myself. Therefore I have taught myself not to crumble in the face of adversity, to be brave, patient and to just hang on with the belief that the challenge will bring a new opportunity. I urge you to really believe the saying that “There is a light at the end of every tunnel. Some tunnels just happen to be longer.”

On a parting note, just follow your heart and be a good and kind human being. The rest will fall in place. You are among the few of this country who have been fortunate enough to have got an opportunity to study and to get your degrees. If you care to look, you will find that there are many for whom going to school is a luxury, let alone to a University. Do not forget those who have been less fortunate. When you can, try to return something to this society. This country needs you. There will be great challenges, great obstacles, but never give up. Towards the end of his life, Rabindranath Tagore had agonized over the devastation being caused by the First World War and the pettiness of the human mind. However, he affirmed, “And yet I shall not commit the grievous sin of losing faith in man”. So young friends, have faith, work hard and the world will be yours for the taking. Go out, and make your mark. Thank you.

Jai Hind.