

Ladies and Gentleman,

It gives me immense pleasure and satisfaction to be in the midst of young students in this congregation who by all yardsticks are the future of our nation. It is on their shoulders that the responsibility of nation caring would be vested with and for the very reason their shoulders are required to be made stout and strong so that they are able to sustain and carry the said mantle of responsibility with ease, elegance, efficiency and effectivity as well.

It is in this context; one needs to recall that legendary educationist Dr. D.S. Kothari in his historical 2<sup>nd</sup> Education Commission report categorically stated that **'the destiny of India is being shaped in its class rooms'**. He meant very loudly and clearly that the future and fate of a nation is not just dependent on how effective laws are being enacted for it, is also not determined on what are its materialistic gains, progress and prosperity, on the contrary it is substantially dependent on shaping of the young minds at the diligent hands of their teachers engaged in education for the purposes of evoking the fate and future of the generations by not only entitling them to be conferred with academic distinctions, but also enriching them by such al-round inputs which could make them a revered persona, a successful human being and above all a committed citizen who has 'Welfare' of the country paramount in his mind and harbors 'Global Comaraderie' in his intent.

Education per se including higher and professional education in the Indian context by the founding fathers was not construed as a sole modality for the purposes of gaining the livelihood. On the contrary it was a tool for actualizing the '**relevance**' of human life as a whole. The founding fathers in the Constitution clearly mandated that education in free India would not be the monopoly of a handful of those who can afford it, but would be for actualization and creation of egalitarian free India, where every deserving individual would be legitimately entitled to **dignity, honour, esteem and above all the self-respect.**

It was also mandated in the Constitution as a part of the enshrined guarantee to all its citizens that these would be extended to them in a free flowing manner, so that even the weakest of the weak, poorest of the poor and the remotest of the remote is equally brought into the main stream of development in free and independent India.

The contemplation of '**equity, equitability and extension of opportunity**' to all concerned beyond the limitations of 'caste, colour, creed, sex, religion, faith, belief, occupation, vocation, profession, trade, calling and geographical location', so as to evolve the essence of the contemplated '**Welfare State**' is the hallmark of the Constitutional ethos.

Education including higher and professional education was therefore rightly considered as an '**avenue**' which is supposed to extend to each citizen of free India towards the attainment of the pristine goal of '**self actualization**' which is blended with

**'achievement, attainment and accomplishment'** alike, apart from ensuring a gainful livelihood resulting in addition of **'decency and dignity'** to their lives as enshrined under Article 21 of the Constitution of India. Higher education therefore is endowed with these areas to be attained by the common man in a cogent, credible and a meaningful manner.

Dental Education in the domain of higher education has a purposive and meaningful relevance. The concept of the **'Welfare State'** as incorporated in the Constitution means an all-round development of all the citizens of the country. The two cardinal parameters of development towards actualization of the said **'Welfare State'** were identified to be **'Health and Education'**.

When it comes to dental education, these two parameters get interlinked in as much as dental education turns out to be a **'foundry'** through which trained health manpower is generated which ultimately turns out to be the backbone for the dispensation of an effective health care delivery system ending up in extension of preventive, promotive and curative dimensions of dental health in an **'accessible and affordable'** manner.

It is true that the level of dental awareness in the country is wanting on several counts. Further the issue is complicated by virtue of the cost of the dental care which to an average poor citizen of the country is realistically non-affordable. In addition, the issue is complicated by virtue of the trained dental health manpower being pooled up mostly in urban and to some extent

in semi-urban areas. Rural India totally is devoid of the same which by itself is a huge issue to address.

Further, the contemplation of the requirement of the trained dental health manpower is also an area on which there are divergent observations and the extent of requirement is also placed differently. Going by the observations that have been brought out in the Knowledge Commission Report it is stated that "in terms of the population census of 2001 we are deficient by nearly 2 lacs dentists.

In case this gap is taken to be genuine, then in last few years the phenomena of dental seats in various dental colleges remaining unfilled to a very substantial degree also raises several eyebrows. It is imperative that one needs to find out as what are the reasons for the students not seeking admissions to dental colleges. Is it the lack of employability, lack of possibility of meaningful professional practice and want of other developing and prospering avenues?

Whatever the reason that be the material issue is that it needs to be analyzed with a sense of probity and sincerity to fathom into the core issue so as to ensure that timely initiatives are undertaken resulting in evolving of strategies which would mitigate the concerns and challenges that confront the dental trained health manpower as of now.

In addition the issue of full time faculty requirement and supply thereof is another area, which is equally a matter of concern. The issue of faculty development is also wanting. Likewise, the propositions of evolving bridge course for the dental graduates to be made entitled to practice modern medicine in my opinion also end up on belittling the scope and mandate of the dental education per se.

The growth of the dental education realistically needs to be viewed in the context of '**demographic dividends**' that the population of all the countries have in their fold. There was a time when it was a consistent belief of all the Indians that the growing population was one of the biggest 'bane' for this country. However, it has crystallized that the Indian population in terms of the demography is unique in as much as 52% of the population today is below the age of 25 years and nearly 68% is below the age of 35 years, which means India is a unique country in terms of having highest percentage of young people in its fold. It is also true that this uniqueness of the demography of Indian population would be there for about coming 20 to 25 years. This, therefore, turns out to be a really critical period, which could be availed by all of us to use and utilize this youthful population to its maximum in terms of transforming them into a precious human and intellectual resource, which could dispense to the global concerns as a whole.

It is here, I am tempted to refer to Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, the former President of India, who emphasized that we need to ignite the minds of the youth and appropriately tune and train them, so

that they turn out to be a genuine asset towards furtherance of the cause of 'Mother India' on the path of it garnering '**global supremacy**'. As such, this young ignited brigade, in their manifested illumination turns out to be the '**treasure**' and which needs to be effectively actualized. Utilization of this youth in the portals of the dental schools and transforming them into the '**trained dental health manpower**' through the '**transformative mode**' is one of the '**crucial area**' which needs to be diligently planned in the nick of time and effectively executed in a well laid time bound manner.

Dental Education has to sustain to the objectives of higher education contemplated in First Education Commission report by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, when he said that '**higher education shall cater to training, research, extension culminating in sustainable development of the society**'. In continuance of these very objectives the '12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan' has spelt out that higher education including dental education shall be governed by the trinity of '**Access, Equity and Equality**' resulting in **sustainable development for the national cause**.

'**Access**' and '**Equity**' have been definitely governed by the laws operable in the country from the constitutional mandate. However, the real '**touch stone**' which is the matter of concern is of incorporation of '**quality**' in dental education. It is this concern for quality which makes it imperative for all of us to grapple with this problem in all its contours and manifestations.

The **'quality essence'** in dental education needs to be worked out in terms of –

- (i) **Periodic update of the curricular contents**
- (ii) **Formulation of the crystallized objectives**
- (iii) **National Faculty Development Programme for training the trainers for desired output.**
- (iv) **Incorporation of functioning of teaching tools, technology and mode of assessment and evaluation.**
- (v) **Inculcation of research, culture and the blending dental education with extension activities for over all the societal good.**

There is a imperative need that there has to be an **'accreditation mechanism'** which has to be put into place for the purposes of **objective, transparent and accountable accreditation** of dental school in the country. The material reality is that as of now but for the **'National Assessment and Accrediting Council'** created under the University Grants Commission, **there is no other accrediting modality open and available for dental schools in the country.**

It is imperative that diligent stock is taken of the material fact that in the context of globalization, with the withering out of the geographical boundaries, the vision for all the health professionals in all countries should be that they need to be

educated to mobilize knowledge and to engage in critical reasoning and ethical conducts so that they are competent to participate in patients and population centered health system as members of locally responsive and globally connected teams. The various instructional and institutional reforms as incorporated in **Lancet Commission Report** need to be **diligently dealt to be incorporated for the outcomes with reference to 'transformative learning' and 'interdependence in dental education'**.

The **'transformative learning'** as propounded in the said report is about developing leadership attributes and its purpose is to produce enlightened change agents. It involves **three fundamental shifts, from facts memorization to searching, analysis and synthesis of information for decision making, from seeking professional credentials to achieving core competencies for effective team work in health systems and from non clinical adoption of educational models to creative adoption of global resources to address local priorities.**

Likewise, **interdependence** in education also involves **three fundamental shifts, namely from isolated to harmonized education and health system, from stand alone institutions to networks, alliances and consortia and from inward looking institutional preoccupations to harnessing global flows of education content, teaching resources and innovations.**



These are the **'vital areas'** which need to be incorporated into our system of dental education by such need based alterations as would be mandated in the context of the **national needs, contemporary and long term concerns and the arising challenges thereto.**

I know it for certain that such an exercise cannot be an **'isolated'** one and also a one time affair. It has to be **'ongoing'** and has to have a **'holistic approach'** to be viewed **'neutrally'** for its desired update and alterations as is required from time to time. This will mean necessary awareness, realization and unending zeal and commitment to actualize the same beyond **'narrow and self-centric'** considerations on part of the all concerned so as to make the system of dental education **vibrant, meaningful, creative, productive, quality based, transparent, accountable and above all learner centric.**

I wish that by diligent application of mind necessary steps are undertaken in order to do real good to the cause of dental education in the country. This congregation should turn out to be one of the thinking focal points on these issues and bring out definitive recommendations for the purposes of their consideration and actualization in times to come.

I wish all my young students all success in times to come.