

## CEPT UNIVERSITY

Seventh Convocation, March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013

Welcome Address by Dr. Bimal Patel, President

1. Friends: We are gathered this morning for the Seventh Convocation of CEPT University. The university will confer degrees on students who have completed their programs of study during the academic session 2011 – 12. It will also confer awards won during that period.
2. On this special occasion, I am very happy to welcome our Chief Guest, Padmabhushan Elaben Bhatt. Elaben Bhatt needs no introduction, particularly in Ahmedabad. However, not all of us are aware of her many accomplishments. Let me present a brief introduction.
3. Known as the “gentle revolutionary,” Elaben Bhatt has dedicated her life to improving the lives of India’s poorest and most oppressed women workers. In 1972, she founded the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA), a trade union that today has more than 1.3 million members. In 1974, she founded SEWA Cooperative Bank. Today, this bank reaches out to 3 million women. She was a Member of the Rajya Sabha and, subsequently, a Member of the Indian Planning Commission. She founded and served as chair for Women’s World Banking. She also served as a trustee of the Rockefeller Foundation for a decade. She has received several awards. They include the Padmashree and the Padmabhushan, the Ramon Magsaysay Award and the Right Livelihood Award. She has been awarded several honorary doctorates by universities such as Harvard and Yale. She is a Member of the Council of The Elders brought together by Nelson Mandela. She is a Director on the Central Board of the Reserve Bank of India. She has authored a book titled “We Are Poor but So Many”. Oxford University Press published it in 2006. Last but not the least, the President of India conferred the Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development for 2011 on Elaben Bhatt a couple of weeks ago. Elaben, we are privileged to have you here this morning.
4. I want to say one more thing about Elaben. CEPT University is proud that Elaben is also the mother of one of our alumni. Mihir, her son, joined the School of Architecture in 1977 and received his undergraduate degree from here. Elaben, we are proud to count you as one of our family members

5. I also have the pleasure of welcoming our Chairman, Shri Sanjay Lalbhai. Sanjaybhai also needs no introduction. He is Chairman and Managing Director of Arvind Ltd., a very important Indian conglomerate. It was under his leadership that Arvind has become one of the largest manufacturers of woven textiles in India, and one of the largest denim fabric manufacturers in the world. In addition to being a business leader, Sanjaybhai is deeply involved with higher-level education and research. Sanjaybhai is the President of Ahmedabad Education Society and Ahmedabad University. He is also a member of the Board of Governors of the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, Chairman of Ahmedabad Textile Industry's Research Association and a member of the Council of Management of the Physical Research Laboratory. Sanjaybhai, we are thankful for the keen interest you take in the development of CEPT University and we are privileged to have you present at this convocation.
6. I am also very happy to welcome Members of the Governing Body, Members of the Board of Management, Faculty Members, alumni and students of CEPT University.
7. And, last but not the least, I especially welcome all the parents of our students; particularly the parents and guests of our award-winning and graduating students who are with us today. It is indeed a special occasion. Today we honor the achievements of our students and all of us at CEPT University are very happy that you are with us to share in our joy and pride.
8. As many of you well know, CEPT University is a very active institution. Besides teaching, it is engaged in many research, publication, advisory and capacity building engagements. On account of this the University has gained wide reputation as being a very 'happening' place – a place where many interesting and important things are continually happening and a place where many achievements are continually being logged.
9. It is customary, during the convocation, for the President to list all of the key achievements of the students and faculty members of the University during the previous year. However, this year, I am not going to follow convention. I am only going to talk about three instances during the last year that, in my view, bring out some of the key qualities of our University.
10. I am limiting talk about our many achievements during the past year so that in the second part of my talk I can focus on the future. I want to tell you something about the very important introspective, visioning and restructuring exercise that is underway at CEPT University.

11. So, first, let me focus on three occasions during the past year that highlighted the strengths of CEPT University.
12. During the last year, two of our Faculties celebrated important anniversaries. The Faculty of Architecture, which was established as the School of Architecture in 1962 completed fifty years. The Faculty of Planning, which was established as the School of Planning in 1972 completed forty years. A number of activities, such as exhibitions, seminars, and get-togethers were organized to mark these anniversaries, and, many people came together to participate in them – founders of the two faculties, past and present deans and directors, past and present faculty members, administrative staff, alumni and students.

The celebratory events and the seminars highlighted a number of positive aspects of both faculties. First, the enthusiasm with which the events were organized made it clear that though both faculties are now middle aged, they have not lost their vigor. In fact, they seem to be imbued with as much enthusiasm and energy as they had in their youth. Second, the exhibitions of representative student work over the last fifty years - particularly the one mounted by the Faculty of Architecture – made it clear that over the last fifty years, education has remained a very serious business at CEPT University. Faculty members have been continually thinking about what to teach and how to teach it. And, students have been committed, hard working and passionate right through the five decades. This is no mean achievement. It is not easy for institutions to remain focused on the pursuit of excellence over a period of five decades. Third, in both cases, alumni came together with much enthusiasm and joy to celebrate the anniversaries. This made it clear that both faculties have been able to build large supportive communities around themselves and that alumni have very warm feelings towards CEPT University. Fourth, exhibition of alumni works made it clear that our alumni are highly accomplished and that they work in key positions across the world. This too is no small achievement. All the persons associated with both the Faculties deserve the highest commendation.

13. Second, I would like to tell you a bit about a very small but highly significant three days long Teacher Training Workshop that was organized by the Faculty of Architecture last September. The workshop was attended by forty-five teachers from architecture colleges across the country – from colleges in Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Indore and many others cities. During the workshop past and present architecture faculty members at CEPT University shared their experiences and pedagogic insights with the participants. It is important to note that this was not a free, grant-funded teacher-training workshop. Participants, or their home institutions, had to

pay to attend. Based on the feedback received, I am very happy to report that the workshop was an absolute success and a large number of inquiries as to when the next one is going to be held have come in.

The success of this workshop is significant for two reasons. First, it clearly attests to what is already widely acknowledged – that CEPT University is a leader in architectural education in the country. Second. We have been informally influencing architectural education throughout the country. We now clearly know how to formally influence architectural education across the country. All those involved in this Teacher Training Workshop deserve commendation. Since, the Faculty of Design, the Faculty of Planning and the Faculty of Technology are all leaders in their respective fields I am sure that similar workshops will be held by all of them.

Third, I want to tell you something about our pedagogic philosophy. A few months ago, the postgraduate programs in Structural Design and in Construction Project Management underwent a relatively routine accreditation inspection. We had voluntarily applied for this inspection. To carry out the inspection the AICTE's highly regarded National Accreditation Board had sent four senior professors from four different colleges across the country. We are yet to receive the results of the inspection. However, I want to share with you an appreciative comment that they made during the session when they tell us about our strengths and weaknesses. It reinforced our confidence in a key aspect of our pedagogic philosophy.

The inspection team told us that one feature of our pedagogy was very novel and very good – our use of studios in teaching engineering. In fact they were so impressed by our use of studio based teaching that they said that they were going to try and propagate its merits at the national level.

For those of you who are not familiar with it, studio based teaching is a pedagogic approach that is common in architectural education. It is not traditionally used in training engineering professional. It is an approach that is opposed to the abstract teaching of theories and concepts.

In studio based teaching students are confronted by life-like situations. They are then told to themselves identify problems and attempt solving those problems. Theories and concepts are introduced after the students are engaged in problem solving. For example, planning students are taken to an area of the city, told to talk with people and to identify problems and then told to work out solutions. Only after they have tackled problems by themselves, are they introduced to established concepts and theories.

Those who believe in studio based teaching believe that teaching theory in the abstract, and hoping that students will somehow manage to apply the theory when they confront real problems, is not a good way of training professionals. If someone wants to learn how to drive a car, the best thing is to tell the person to get in the drivers seat and start driving.

Much like driving teachers, who believe that driving cannot be taught by teaching theory in the abstract, faculty members at CEPT University strongly believe that studios should be at the heart of professional education. This includes faculty members at the Faculty of Technology. On account of this our technology programs are unique and noteworthy. They are not like other engineering programs.

It was therefore particularly gratifying that an independent and random set of senior teachers from across the country clearly endorsed a fundamental aspect of the pedagogic philosophy at our University and wanted to see it being more widely used at the national level.

14. As I said earlier, at CEPT University many significant things besides teaching are continually happening and many achievements are continually being logged. I have only focused on a few events and achievements. In doing so, I have left out some really important work being done at the University. For example, I have not told you about the wonderful research on traditional crafts of Gujarat being undertaken at the Faculty of Design. I have told you nothing about the important work on energy and habitats also being undertaken at the Faculty of Design. I have also made no mention of the terrific work on the Bus Rapid Transport Systems being undertaken at the Faculty of Planning.
15. You have to excuse me for not giving you a more comprehensive picture of our achievements. I do want to spend some time telling you about the reimagining and restructuring exercise that is underway at the University.
16. Last November, our Chairman Sanjay Lalbhai along with members of the Governing Body and the Board of Management, suggested to us that having completed fifty years since our establishment, we, meaning the faculty and staff of the university, should undertake a deep and critical introspective exercise. They suggested that we should examine all aspects of the University and, where necessary, we should make plans for restructuring, renewal and rejuvenation.
17. I am glad to report that, prompted by this watchful and thoughtful intervention, since the last few months, the faculty and staff of the University

has been enthusiastically engaged in reimagining and restructuring CEPT University.

18. Our internal deliberations commenced with a series of unstructured discussions amongst groups of randomly selected faculty members. These discussions helped in a number of ways. First, they helped in identifying our core strengths, our best traditions and our most effective practices. As you all know, there are many things we do very well at CEPT. Also, there are many ideas that we hold dear. We wanted to first clearly identify these ideas and practices so that we may strengthen them. Second, the discussion helped in identifying issues that needed attention; things that are not doing quite right and practices that we need to improve. Lastly, the discussions also helped to generate ideas for change.
19. The unstructured discussions were followed by a series of detailed structured meetings in the Executive Council of the University. Through these structured meetings we were able to generate a more concrete vision for the future functioning of the university. We are also able to more refined plans for restructuring the University.
20. We then took this reimagined vision and plans to a wider forum for discussion. We involved the wider community of university staff, visiting faculty members, alumni, student representatives, and other well wishers of the University in our deliberations.
21. Finally, a few weeks ago, our plans were discussed and ratified by the university's Board of Management. We now believe that we have a very good restructuring plan in place. We are now busy detailing it and implementing it. The results will become apparent over the next few semesters.
22. Let me take some time to tell you about a few of the conclusions that we have arrived at and some of the new policies that we are going to enforce.
23. First of all, we have decided that, for the foreseeable future, CEPT University is going to remain firmly focused on being a 'Habitat University'. That is to say, all of its programs and activities are going to be focused on understanding, designing, planning, constructing and managing human settlements and habitats.
24. The numerous faculties of the University are therefore going to be reorganized as five robust faculties: the Faculty of Architecture, the Faculty of Planning, the Faculty of Design, the Faculty of Technology and the Faculty

of Management. The last one, the Faculty of Management, is a new faculty that we are setting up to train professionals in project management and the management of human settlements.

25. All of the faculties will function autonomously, as they have always done. They will also continue to be charged with the responsibility of upholding the value of all the degrees, diplomas and certificates. Besides reorganizing the faculties, we have also created a number of new administrative and academic offices. These offices, which will be led by faculty members, will work with the various faculties to define University policies. They will also ensure synergistic functioning between the faculties.
26. The university's various resources and facilities, such as its workshops and labs that are presently housed within separate faculties and are managed separately are being consolidated. We believe that consolidating them and managing them centrally, in the way that our library functions at present, will ensure better functioning. It will also make all of the facilities more accessible to all students at the university.
27. To better manage the vast amount of contracted research and consulting that CEPT does, we are setting up a special purpose organization to be called 'CEPT University Research and Consulting'. Within this organization, there will be a number of cross-faculty thematic research groups. These research groups will focus on particular areas of research. One, for example, could be focused on 'Energy and Habitats'. Another could be focused on 'Public Transport and Habitats'. The number of such groups will depend on the research interests of the faculty members at the University. Each of these groups will have its own research agenda and will synergize and expand the research work being done at the university.
28. About seventy five percent of CEPT University's revenues come from student fees. About twenty-two percent of revenues come from recurring government grants. These grants are for three of our four undergraduate programs and a few of our many postgraduate programs. Because we take grants, we are required to follow some regulations that we would not otherwise have to follow. For example, because we take grants from the Government of Gujarat, we are not allowed to admit a larger proportion of students from outside Gujarat. This is not very good for our University. If we want to be a great university we have to be highly cosmopolitan. Therefore, having examined the cost and benefits of receiving grants, we are now fairly certain that, as soon as it is practically feasible, we should become fully self-financed. Being fully self-financed will make CEPT University's

finances more stable and sustainable in the long run. More importantly, being self-reliant will also strengthen our autonomy.

Of course, this will also mean that we will have to compete more fiercely with other institutions that are getting government grants and charging lower fees. However, we are not afraid of this. We strongly believe that exposing ourselves to the stimulating pressure of competition will only make us more efficient. Besides this, the pressure of competition will make us focus more squarely on the quality of education that our institution delivers. Competition will spur us to excel.

29. We are aware that, at present, our infrastructure is under great stress. However, improving infrastructure requires money. To generate this money we are overhauling the University's financial management system. By doing this, we will be better able to control expenses. By controlling expenses we will be able to consistently generate modest surpluses. And, we will be able to use these surpluses to continually update the University's infrastructure.
30. A number of changes are going to be made to the way teaching programs are presently organized at the University. First of all, all of the postgraduate programs conferring the same degree, for example the M. Arch., are going to be run jointly. As a result of this, the first semesters of these programs will be jointly taught, in the manner that the M Plan program and the MIAD programs are already doing. On account of this change, students joining the various postgraduate programs will be able to get the benefit of learning from a larger number of the great teachers that we have here.
31. We are reorganizing CEPT's calendar. From next year onwards, besides our two semesters, we will have two more four weeks long teaching sessions. They will be called, CEPT Summer School and CEPT Winter School. Don't worry. These teaching sessions will not be compulsory. During these sessions CEPT University's faculty members and a large number of other people will offer a wide variety of innovative month-long teaching programs. These teaching programs will be modeled on the Related Study Programs that you are already familiar with. We intend to open these programs not only to our own students, but also to students from schools across the country. We think that CEPT University's Summer School and Winter School will soon become very famous, as the most happening place to be during summer and winter vacations!
32. From the point of view of our students, perhaps the most important change we are going to make is that, from next semester onwards, only seventy five percent of credits are going to be compulsory credits. The rest are going to



be elective credits. It will be possible to use these elective credits to register for courses in any faculty of the University. For example, from next semester onwards it will be possible for a person who joins a master's program in planning to take course in the master program in architecture or in the masters program in the Faculty of Design. We believe that this will be truly revolutionary, for a number of reasons. First, by doing this we will bring together and synergize all the teaching resources that we have at the university. We will be able to finally realize the vision that was envisaged when, in 1972, the Center for Environmental Planning and Technology was formed to promote holistic thinking about our habitats. Second, students will be able to design their own course of study to a greater extent than they are able to at present. Allowing them to do so, and functioning on the belief that each of us knows best what is good for ourselves, will strengthen CEPT University's traditional commitment to liberal values. Third, to be allowed to make more choices on their own will better train our students to be more responsible individuals and therefore more responsible citizens. Fourth, we strongly believe that if we want our students to be innovative - a key quality, much in demand today - we must allow them to experiment in their course of study. Allowing them to study in different faculties will help them to see the world from different perspectives. We believe that we must encourage them to leave their comfort zones and to learn how to function in unfamiliar settings.

We have no doubt that making this new system function will take a lot of effort. We are bound to face many difficulties in the first few semesters. However, we strongly believe that the rewards are going to be immense. Therefore we must all make the efforts and bear the difficulties.

33. This morning a total of 391 students will receive their degrees. Many awards will be conferred. On behalf of my colleagues, Deans, faculty members, staff and myself, I congratulate all those receiving degrees and awards. All of us wish you all the very best in life and hope that you will make the best of it. In doing so you will make us proud. We also hope that you will stay in touch and keep coming back to your alma mater.
34. Thank you.