

CEPT UNIVERSITY

Eleventh Convocation, February 18th, 2017

Welcome Address by Dr. Bimal Patel, President

Friends: We are gathered this morning for the eleventh convocation of CEPT University. The University will confer degrees on students who have completed their programs of study during the academic session 2015–16. It will also confer awards won during that period.

On this special occasion, I am very happy to welcome our Chief Guest, Shri Tridip Suhrud.

Dr. Tridip Suhrud is the Director & Chief Editor, Sabarmati Ashram Preservation and Memorial Trust at the Gandhi Ashram. He is also a member of the Gandhi Heritage Sites Mission of the Government of India.

Dr. Suhrud's work is focused on the life and thought of Mahatma Gandhi and the social and cultural history of modern Gujarat.

To start with, he is a skilled translator. Some of his recent works include *Beloved Babu: the Mirabehn-Gandhi correspondence* (with Thomas Weber), *Gandhiji Ni Rojnishi, Hind Swaraj ek Anushilan* and a bilingual edition of Mahatma Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* (with Suresh Sharma). His translation of the fourth volume of the Gujarati novel *Saraswatichandra* by Govardhanram Tripathi will be published this year. Dr. Suhrud was given the Katha Award in 1999 and Sahitya Akademi Award in 2010 for his translation work.

With Master's degrees, both in Economics and Political Science, and a doctorate degree in Political Science, Dr. Suhrud holds membership of several institutional bodies and committees, including Indian Institute of Advanced Study in Shimla, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti and the National Gandhi Museum. He is also a member of the Governing board of MICA since 2015.

Over the last four or five years, Dr. Suhrud has been very active in reimagining and revitalizing Gandhi Ashram. His role there has evolved. He had been using the Gandhi Ashram library for his personal research since 1995. Then in 2007, a committee was established to revitalize and modernize the Gandhi Ashram. This committee comprised Dr. Suhrud, Sudarshan Iyengar and Kinnari Bhatt among others. Then in 2012, some national funding became available for modernizing the Gandhi Ashram archives and for setting up a web portal for the archives. It is at this time that Dr. Suhrud was charged with a broad based task of revitalizing Gandhi Ashram. Since then he has been leading this effort on modernizing the Gandhi Ashram Archives, setting up a portal to make this information available to everyone, modernizing the functioning of Gandhi Ashram, building bridges with other institutions and more.

The kind of revitalization and renewal that is being undertaken at Gandhi Ashram is needed in many public institutions in India. Public institutions like Gandhi Ashram play an important role in establishing the ethical climate and public discourse of any society. Building and ensuring well-functioning public institutions is immensely important and I hope Dr. Suhrud will share a little more about his work in his talk.

Dr. Suhrud, we are highly honored that you accepted our invitation to be our guest and address us this morning.

I also have the pleasure of welcoming our Chairman, Shri Sanjay Lalbhai. As many of you already know, he is a well-known and highly respected business leader. As Chairman and Managing Director of Arvind Ltd., Sanjaybhai led Arvind in its quest to be one of the largest manufacturers of woven textiles in India and one of the largest denim fabric manufacturers in the world.

Sanjaybhai is also the present day torchbearer of a remarkable tradition of enlightened and farsighted civic leadership in Ahmedabad, which is over a century old. Long before the concept of 'corporate social responsibility' became a business buzz word, it is this tradition, of civic minded business leaders supporting noble, strategic and far-reaching causes, that has allowed Ahmedabad to play a far bigger role in the life of our nation than Ahmedabad's size or economy warrants.

Sanjaybhai is deeply interested in and involved with higher-level education and research. He is the President of Ahmedabad Education Society and is involved in many other institutions such as Ahmedabad University, Ahmedabad Textile Industry's Research Association and 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.

I am also very happy to welcome Shri Prafull Anubhai, member of the Governing Body of CEPT University. Shri Anubhai is also a very important civic leader of Ahmedabad whose work in higher education and in the realm of Indian classical music is well recognized. Prafullbhai, we are privileged to have you present at this convocation.

I am also very happy to welcome the other members of the Governing Body, members of the Board of Management, faculty members, alumni and students of CEPT University.

And, last but not the least, I especially welcome all the parents of our students, particularly the parents and guests of the students who are graduating and winning awards 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.

Every year, during the convocation I have spoken about some of our accomplishments from the past year and some of the key tasks that lie ahead. Today, I would like to give

you all a broad overview of the internal changes we have been making over the last few years to ensure that CEPT University continues to excel. After doing this I would like to briefly talk about the need for a more enlightened regulatory framework to regulate institutions such as ours. I will start with an overview of the internal changes that we have accomplished.

Over the last four years, CEPT University's institutional structure has been comprehensively transformed to ensure efficiency, accountability, shared governance and transparency in the functioning of the University. It now comprises clearly demarcated functional units with better defined roles and responsibilities for its various functionaries. A common calendar, common course typology and a university-wide registration system are also well in place. All of these and a number of other measures, now allow the various units of the University to function in a decentralized yet integrated and synergistic manner.

CEPT University has now fully embraced choice based pedagogy to better enable each student to chart a unique well-suited trajectory of learning through the University.

Curricula of all programs at the University are continually reviewed and modernized. Board of Studies have been established to periodically review the student work at each of our faculties.

A university-wide student feedback system is in place for students to provide feedback to the faculty members and the University about the structure, content, methodology and delivery of each course.

A number of new programs have been added. CEPT now offers Bachelor's in Urban Design, Master's in Habitat Management, M. Tech in Building Energy Performance, M. Des in Furniture Design, PhD in Architecture and PhD in Planning.

The Summer and Winter Schools are new additions to the academic programs. They offer a wide range of learning opportunities at the University and also provide a mechanism for engaging a very wide array of teachers from across the world.

Students at CEPT University can also now register for approved courses at Ahmedabad University and vice versa. Over the years, as the two universities grow, this will further expand learning opportunities at both universities.

Any institution is only as good as its people. CEPT University is blessed to have so many good teachers. We are proud of both, those who are serving full time at the University and those who come in as visiting faculty members.

The university has taken a number of measures to improve, expand and invigorate staff, and to encourage them to excel. The University now routinely recruits nationally and internationally for teaching and non-teaching positions. We also encourage young professionals to come in and teach to build an early love for teaching in them.

A CEPT Teaching Fellowship program has been institutionalized to invite young foreign trained graduates to spend a year and assist with teaching at CEPT; this adds to the diversity of teaching staff at the University.

A new evidence based appraisal process for granting salary increments and promotions has been established. The tradition of granting fixed increments to all staff members and of granting promotions on the basis of seniority has been discontinued.

To better focus, expand and support research at the University, we have established CRDF – CEPT Research and Development Foundation, a not-for-profit company. All existing research centers are now under the umbrella of CRDF. Two new research centers have also been established: Center for Urban Land and Real Estate Policy (CULREP) and Center for Procurement and Program Support.

The University has initiated a new Directed Research Program to better synergize student research work with research conducted by faculty members and research centers. This new program is expected to considerably expand the research output of the University.

To ensure long-term financial sustainability and autonomy of the University, a big step taken last year is our successful transition to become a fully self-financed institute. Since last few years, we also have a new fee policy aimed at ensuring inter cohort equity and financial sustainability. Simultaneously, we have expanded the availability of scholarships and financial support through student assistantships, research assistantships and teaching assistantships.

To better manage the existing infrastructure of the University the university has established a well-staffed campus management office.

Over the last few years we have been able to raise considerable sums of money from non-fee based sources, that is, from grants and endowments to be able to fund the construction of new buildings such as this new Lilavati Lalbhai Library, the new workshop facility, the new canteen facility. All of these facilities will be completed within the next few months and formally inaugurated in the coming semester.

A five-year campus expansion plan has been put in place to support current and future needs of the University and we will soon be taking up the building of a new academic facilities building in the north-west of the campus and a new building for the Faculty of Technology.

While we will acknowledge the support of the various philanthropic trusts who have supported the building of these facilities when they are formally inaugurated, today I would like to thank the Ahmedabad Education Society for supporting infrastructure development at the University.

To sum up, the University has been making a number of internal changes aimed at promoting excellence. However, this is not enough if we are to truly excel. For us to be able to truly excel, something else will also have to change, and that is the regulatory environment in which we operate.

Most of you must be aware that educational institutions in our country are heavily regulated. They are regulated by professional bodies as well as by various departments and agencies of the government. Matters such as admission, curriculum and finances are all affected by these regulations. While all these regulations are underpinned by good intentions, they are often so poorly structured and so rigidly framed that they end up causing more damage than good. Allowing higher education institutions to excel through a different kind of regulatory framework is not only necessary, it is now an urgent priority.

This view has recently been endorsed by a parliamentary committee set up to reform the Medical Council Act. The committee comprised high-ranking members from the Niti Aayog and the Prime Minister's Office and they were focusing on the Medical Council Act because this act regulated medical education in our country. The committee has recommended revolutionary reforms.

Typically, higher education institutions in India are required to meet minimum standards. Thus for example they are required to have minimum prescribed infrastructure, or minimum number of teachers, or minimum numbers of books in their libraries. If they meet these standards, they are given 'recognition' and licensed to operate. No attempt is made to find out if the students are actually learning or not. If the objective is ensuring that quality education is being imparted, one should focus on what the students are learning. Regulators should not be focused on rigidly insisting on institutions meeting input standards.

The new proposed method of regulating medical education is focused on learning outcomes rather than inputs. The report of the committee says and I quote, "...the input based regulatory philosophy underlying the current MCI has turned into a high entry barrier facing education providers without corresponding benefit in terms of delivery of quality medical education. Hence, the NMC regulation is to be **overwhelmingly** based on outcomes rather than inputs."

Similarly, recommending a change in the manner in which fees of private institutions are regulated, the committee sees no need to regulate fees for all students if, "a merit-based transparent admission system ... is in place." Rather, it is needed only for those who are deserving but unable to afford the fees. To address the issue of meritorious students unable to afford the high fees, it says that the regulating body "may be empowered to fix norms for regulating fees for a proportion of seats (not exceeding 40% of the total seats)." For the rest, the institution may be given full freedom to charge

the fees that they deem appropriate provided they “...transparently advertise the tuition and any other fees upfront on their websites with no other fees permitted.”

These changes being promoted by the highest policy making body of the country show a promise for an enlightened regulatory framework for institutions such as ours. We hope that well-functioning institutions with demonstrated commitment to excellence and a recognized ability to compete with the best in the world can be regulated keeping some of the above principles in mind. We also hope to see some of the benefits of such enlightened regulation accrue to CEPT, especially greater flexibility with respect to our admissions and greater financial autonomy for our functioning.

As I said, allowing higher education institutions to excel by providing them a more enlightened regulatory framework is not only necessary, it is now an urgent priority. If institutions such as CEPT University, that have already put in so many systems to promote excellence in their functioning, are to truly excel, the regulatory environment, at least for such institution, is going to have to be far more enlightened than it is today.

Finally, before I return to the program at hand I want to remind all of us that without the hard work of the faculty members, both, permanent and visiting, and the staff of CEPT University none of the developments that I am taking about would have been possible. I sincerely thank all of our faculty members. I am sure that all of the students also want to. A round of applause is in order.

This morning a total of 500 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 most of the opportunities it presents. 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.

Thank you.