

FOURTEENTH ANNUAL CONVOCATION

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Convocation Address



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Junagadh Agricultural University
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**Fourteenth Annual Convocation of the
Junagadh Agricultural University, Junagadh, Gujarat
28 December 2018**

Address by Dr. P.K. Mishra

His Excellency Shri Om Prakash Kohli, Governor of Gujarat and Chancellor of the University; Shri R C Faldu, Minister of Agriculture, Rural Development, Fisheries and Transport; Dr. A R Pathak, Vice Chancellor; Dr. V P Chovatiaji, Registrar; Vice Chancellors of State agriculture universities of Gujarat; Members of the Board and Academic Council; members of faculty and staff; distinguished guests; parents and my dear students.

I am delighted to be at Junagadh with all of you today. I thank Dr. Pathak and his team and the University for inviting me to the 14th Convocation of the Junagadh Agricultural University. I was with the Government of Gujarat, as Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister, when it was deliberated and decided to set up four agricultural universities in place of the erstwhile Gujarat Agricultural University. Indeed, the Junagadh Agricultural University came into existence on the 1st May 2004, ten days before I left Gujarat to join the Government of India. Visiting the JAU today takes me back to those early days.

Junagadh literally means 'Old Fort.' Junagadh is testimony to our country's rich heritage right from the ancient period of the Gupta dynasty to the medieval period of Mughals, and later to the modern history of India's independence. Many of you would have seen, in the middle of the town, the imposing Uparkot Fort, which was built by Chandragupta Maurya in 319 BC. It has been witness to many conquests, possibly 16 of them over 800 years.

Then there are edicts of emperor Ashoka which were discovered here by James Tudd in 1843. These edicts are scripted with Brahmi in Pali language and engraved into large granite stones. I am sure, many of you would be aware that Junagadh was one of the last princely states to become part of India after partition in 1947.

Junagadh, the land blessed by the sacred Girnar mountain ranges, is the land of Saint Narsinh Mehta who lived here in the 15th century and who is known for Mahatma Gandhi's favourite bhajan – “Vaishanv Jan To”.

Therefore, in this cradle of such rich history and heritage, this institution of agriculture research and education is truly special. People here are known to be adventurous, brave, hard-working, innovative and adept in trade and commerce. I am sure, students graduating today will follow the same path and excel in their chosen fields.

I heartily congratulate all the students who have received their undergraduate, masters' and doctoral degrees, awards and medals today. I am confident that this milestone will be the foundational stone of many more to come. For you the future is full of hope and promise – for not just you and your loved ones, but our society, nation and humanity. Today as you leave you will take with you not merely your marks or your degree; you will take much more. They will be the experiences you had, the relationships you built, and more than anything else, the things you learned about yourself. You have learnt as much outside classrooms as you did inside them.

Your institution which became a university about one and a half decades ago is in existence for more than half a century, and has covered a remarkable journey with many an accomplishment to its credit. With 31 research stations, seven colleges, and eight polytechnic colleges, it has trained thousands of students and researchers. I understand that the university has developed 61 new crop varieties, particularly of oilseeds, millets, cotton, and vegetables, during the last decade. It has been serving the needs of capacity building and extension activities for farmers.

Two decades ago, in the year 2000, Government of Gujarat constituted a high level committee of senior officials and experts to prepare **Gujarat Agro Vision 2010**, a comprehensive vision for the next decade for accelerated agricultural development. The Committee took the help of reputed consultants, and interacted with several stakeholder groups such as government officials, representatives of industry, NGOs

and other experts. I was closely associated with the work, as Principal Secretary to Government of Gujarat in the Department of Agriculture. During the deliberations there was intense debate as to what should be the target rate of agricultural growth, based on which the approach, strategy and operational aspects would be worked out. The suggestions ranged from 3 per cent to 8 per cent per annum, because in the earlier years the average growth rate for different periods was 2 or 3 per cent. Finally, the report envisaged that *"Agriculture in Gujarat will grow at a real rate of 6.04 per cent per annum for the next ten years."* Many people felt that it was a very unrealistic target which could never be achieved. Even I was not very confident.

Today when we look back Gujarat did achieve a much higher rate of growth – the agriculture sector grew at an annual average rate of 10.97 per cent during the period 2000-01 to 2009-10. It is not my case that such a high rate of growth was because of the **Agro Vision 2010**. Undoubtedly, factors such as technological development, e.g., high yielding varieties of crops such as cotton, quality of governance, and political vision and leadership made this possible. What is, however, important to note is that the spirit of innovation, hard-work and determined efforts can achieve much more than what we can visualise today. I would urge the students to take this as a great lesson for the future.

The role of Green Revolution during the later part of the 1960s and subsequently is well-known. In recent decades, development of new varieties, improved technology, agricultural extension and also rural infrastructure have resulted in increased productivity and production of several crops. Production of food grains, oilseeds, commercial crops and more recently horticultural crops have increased multiple times. Gujarat has been a pioneer in areas such as high-value crops, value addition, and agro processing. It is a leading producer of crops such as groundnut and castor globally. Several other states also have witnessed high rates of agricultural growth in recent years.

In spite of these efforts, there are reports of farmer distress in some parts of the country. Some of the pioneering initiatives of agricultural institutions of Gujarat and farmers of Gujarat could show

the way in addressing the issues arising in other parts of the country today:

- How can we hasten the process of enhancing the rural non-farm sector?
- How do we ensure that knowledge of new methods and technology of farming reaches all the farmers in all parts of the country?
- How do we bridge the yield gap between experimental farm and farmer's field?
- India has now reached a stage where large surpluses of some commodities have emerged after meeting domestic demand. What should be the policy for surplus management and export promotion?

Most of you have specialisation and expertise in various aspects of agriculture – developing new varieties, improved technology, agricultural extension and even super-specialities such as biogenetics, molecular biology, and DNA studies. You need to focus and excel in such specialised areas. At the same time, your education and research should not lose sight of how to ensure farmers' well-being and welfare. Two aspects should be kept in mind when we recommend measures for improving agricultural productivity and production:

- a) agricultural growth and development depends as much on our efforts relating to agricultural activities, as on what happens in the sectors other than agriculture, or activities not directly related to agriculture;
- b) the role of rural non-farm sector needs to be integrated with recommendations relating to agricultural activities.

One of the limitations of our approach to agricultural development has been that we have taken a very narrow view of agricultural development at the level of research, agricultural administration and even policy formulation and implementation at government level. Many of you who will be going out of your educational and research institutions and work in various capacities in government, public sector, private sector and even non-governmental

organisations, should keep the above two aspects in mind. That will make your efforts and endeavours more relevant, more meaningful and much more effective.

Government of India has for the first time brought about a shift in our agricultural strategy from growth of production to increase in farmers' income. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi declared on 28 February 2016 that his dream is to see that farmers' income is doubled by 2022 to mark 75 years of India's independence. This is a major shift in our approach, a clear focus on farmer and farmer welfare, rather than simply production and productivity.

For this purpose, a holistic strategy for the agriculture sector was conceptualised. Efforts are being made to follow this with an integrated approach by introducing multiple reforms and programmes with an overall objective of doubling farmers' income. The framework includes the following aspects:

1. Increase productivity/production and reduce losses.
2. Increase market access of agricultural produce through marketing reforms, post-harvest infrastructure and value addition.
3. Reduce input cost of farmers through optimisation of resources used as inputs.
4. Undertake governance and structural reforms.
5. Expand risk mitigation measures to protect farmers against losses due to yield and price risks.
6. Increase investment in and for agriculture.
7. Link development activities in sectors such as water resources, soil health, food processing, rural development, power, information technology, environment, fertilisers, and other sectors to agricultural development.
8. Address 'background risk' through initiatives such as Ayushman Bharat, Ujjwala, Poshan Abhiyan, Matri Vandana, Sukanya Samridhi Yojana/Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Awas Yojana, Swachh Bharat and Indradhanush.

It is important to address the problem of yield-risk and price-risk faced by farmers. Programmes of crop insurance and minimum support price are there for quite some time. It is necessary for all of us to understand and appreciate the principles, objectives and limitations of these programmes. It is also necessary that our expectations are not unrealistic. The students, researchers and faculty of the University can play an important role in raising awareness and facilitating improvement of the programme through a two-way process of bringing out farmer's issues and at the same time familiarising the farmer with the salient features of the programmes.

I would like to urge you to direct your skills and training towards solving the problems of our times and our people. The time is appropriate for new research to be linked with the new paradigm of development of the nation. We need to further innovate.

Technology in particular is going to be a critical factor in this endeavour for human well-being in the coming years. As you go out from here today, you will be joining a powerful wave of disruption and change that is sweeping the world. Technology is changing everything at a very fast pace. Unheard till even a decade or two ago, game changers such as smart phone revolution, internet economy, big data analytics, artificial intelligence, augmented reality, 3D printing, robotics, and blockchain technology are going to transform the way we engage in and the way we live.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's emphasis on technology and Government of India's prioritisation of the same is consistent with this change. The comprehensive **Digital India** umbrella will empower our citizens through multifaceted and multilevel programmes. The **Aadhaar stack** has laid a globally unprecedented public digital infrastructure, on which an unimaginable number of public as well as private services will be able to easily ride. Technology solutions can transform wide-ranging domains, from e-NAM initiative making the entire country a single agricultural market to smart cities programme driving urban governance, and the GEM platform transforming government procurement. Cutting-edge tools such as GIS planning and big data analytics are powering government functions and competencies across many fields of activities.

It is important for us to remember the legacy of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who once said that "My country's culture is agriculture." It is time we revisit our approach to agriculture which is so fundamental to India's culture, in the light of the recent trends and emerging scenarios.

Dear students, you are fortunate to be coming out of this university at a time when Gujarat, and the whole nation, stand at the crossroads of immense potential and possibilities. You represent the youth of our nation; tremendous opportunities await you. You can achieve success in your life and simultaneously contribute to the development of the country as a whole, particularly our farmers and rural people who constitute the majority of the population.

I once again congratulate the students who have received degrees, medals and awards today and wish them all the best for their journey ahead. My best wishes also to the JAU for success in its mission of contributing to the sustainable development goals of the country.

JAI HIND

