

36th Convocation Address

Jahar Saha

31 March 2001

Dr Gururaj Deshpande, our Chief Guest for the 36th Convocation, Dr I. G. Patel, Chairman, IIMA Board of Governors, Members of the IIMA Society, my colleagues, the distinguished audience and the graduating class of 2001.

On behalf of all of us, I would like to thank Dr. Deshpande for accepting our request to be the Convocation Speaker and addressing the graduating class. Dr. Deshpande, I am grateful to you that you could come and be with us on this joyous occasion. Your emphasis on leadership in the new economy and your words on the opportunities and obligations of the new entrants as leaders in a complex and dynamic world of business would benefit our graduating students in their career path.

On this occasion, it is my privilege to review the events and activities of the year that has rolled by and to share with you the way I would like to see the Institute moving in its future path of growth.

The most important event in the year under review was the massive earthquake that Gujarat faced on 26 January 2001. The earthquake flattened four towns in the state and took a heavy toll of life and property in Ahmedabad. In comparison to what happened in Ahmedabad and the rest of Gujarat we emerged relatively unscathed from the disaster. Our buildings were damaged and we had to suspend the academic sessions in our two-year post-graduate programme to repair the damaged dormitories. Fortunately, there was no major injury and none of our buildings suffered any structural damage. We could resume our programmes after two weeks. IIMA community worked together to overcome this temporary setback on our activities. It contributed in its own way to the tragedy in the district of Kutch and other parts of Gujarat. Our students worked in the field to improve the efficiency of relief operations. Our faculty and staff were engaged in co-ordinating relief activities, collecting relief materials and despatching them where they were needed. I publicly applaud the community for their sincere efforts to help the victims of the massive earthquake in Gujarat.

The devastating earthquake that we witnessed has once again driven home very forcefully the point that houses having strong structures and built on strong foundations will withstand the severest shocks. I believe that the same principle applies to institutions. The credit for the Institute's success and its ability to progress even in a turbulent environment must go to the founding members of the Institute who placed its strategy and structures on a very strong logical foundation. The Institute's strategy of making the problems of the real world as the focal point of all its activities and its emphasis on using the Socratic method in conducting classroom sessions have given us prominence to day. Its stress on recruiting young but unknown persons for its faculty and expending time and financial resources for orienting their thinking and attitudes towards becoming effective management educators have given our academic programmes the cutting edge. Developing teaching materials, and writing cases were the hallmark of our activities at this Institute. Building a team of academic administrators for the Institute's academic programmes was a unique feature of the Institute for carrying out its academic strategy. Dr Sarabhai articulated the Institute's approach towards administering rules. He said that the Institute must carry out all the rules that the external world imposes on the Institute in letter and spirit. The Institute will be very flexible in administering the rules it makes for its own

administration. This philosophy has ensured that the outside world never questioned the bonafide of the Institute. It is difficult to describe in words the enthusiasm of all the Institute's members for accomplishing the Institute's purpose.

I have delved in the past not for nostalgic reasons but for putting in perspective the recognition that we are enjoying today. I believe that the best way to pay our tributes to the founding members would be to keep alive the spirit of innovation that has characterised the Institute from its beginning. The 3-Tier Programme, the Management Education programme, the Institute's programmes focussing on problems of Agriculture were specialities of the day. It is in this tradition of nurturing innovations that I am proposing a new area in which the Institute must pioneer.

This relates to "governance." Governance not only of corporations but also of nations should be the focal point of the Institute's new focus. Why do some nations advance on all fronts and why do some nations languish? I am sure that this is an age-old question but we do not have a satisfactory answer to this important question even today. This question is not merely of interest

to academicians but more importantly it is of interest to ordinary citizens who suffer the consequences of poor governance.

Of the twenty-six states and four union territories, at least half a dozen states in the Northeast region and the state of Jammu and Kashmir are convulsed by insurgencies. The problem of caste wars continues to plague some of the states. A communal tension still raises its head in the country. We have not been able to solve the problem of poverty, public health, and education even after fifty years of independence.

All the major stock exchanges in India have undergone convulsions in the last few weeks. Who paid the price for the governance (or the lack of it) of the markets? A report in the 22 March 2001 issue of Times of India is revealing. It says "The turmoil in the stock market has had a horrific impact on a family of four in west Delhi. A sub-stockbroker, his wife and two children were found hanging in their residence on Wednesday evening. He is said to have lost heavily in the tortuous crash of the stock markets this month."

Prof. Tripathi has admirably summed up the situation we are facing to day. He says, "It requires no great insight to conclude that India at present is passing through a deep crisis, if not the deepest ever. Nothing seems to be working right. Practically all the instruments we had created to ensure the

unity and progress of the nation are under great deal of stress -- almost to the breaking point."

Governance is all about giving directions, inculcating values, controlling, monitoring the affairs of corporations and public agencies of a country.

Can we be not concerned with the issues of corporate governance? Shouldn't we use some of our insights and expertise to suggest ways and means to improve the governance of our business houses? Why some corporations in a nation and why some nations are failing in their primary responsibility? Do those in charge of governance lack the competence of doing so? What can the people affected by poor governance do to improve it? I strongly believe that the Institutes like ours must break new ground in this important area. After gaining experience in this area we must then expand our horizons to include the issue of governance of nations. Some people may feel that the issue of governance of nations is way out of the competence of management schools. To these critics my reply would be: "If not us, who? If not now, when?"

Let me congratulate the graduating class. No matter how many convocation ceremonies one attends, seeing young men and women eagerly anticipating the transition from being a student to being a practising manager always

gives one an exhilarating experience. Our Chief Guest has inspired you to strive for leadership and I do hope that all of you would work hard to be in the position of leadership.

While I would echo the views of our chief guest I would like to sound a note of caution. Those of you who would be working in India should realise that in India position of leadership does not necessarily go to the most deserving person. It is only recently that persons like Mr Narayana Murthy are leading the IT sector. He is an example of a person who, starting from a humble position of a research associate in the Institute a few decades ago, has become the leader for creating wealth for this nation and individuals.

Prof. North Douglas says, "History weighs heavily on nations and organisations". The social systems and customs are however deep-rooted and not easy to change. Mahabharat, the Indian epic, shows how the Indian social systems discourage persons with merit from getting into position of leadership because they do not have the right connections. When Karna challenged Arjuna for a contest in archery, Drona insulted Karna by saying that Karna was only the son of a charioteer and did not have the credentials for a contest with blue-blooded Arjuna.

Therefore, do not be discouraged if you do not get into position of leadership because of any reason. More importantly, have the courage that Karna showed when he said that destiny controls an individual's birth but the individual controls the competence the individual will acquire. However, do not yield to the compulsions to join the camp of *adharmā* as Karna did by joining Duryodhan's camp because of the gratitude that he felt for Duryodhan's support when Drona humiliated Karna in public.

I would like to urge that you act with knowledge(vidya), faith and conviction (Shraddha) and deep thinking (upanishada) with positive intentions, no matter where you are placed and whatever you undertake to do. Listen to your inner self: "Are you comfortable with the act you contemplate.?"

I wish you success, prosperity and good luck in your endeavour.