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CONVOCAATION ADDRESS OF SHRI T.A. PAI, MINISTER OF
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I believe we are in the midst of one of the great historic periods in Indian history. Considering the vicissitudes India has gone through ages, since the 19th century, we have been trying to build a modern Indian nation. The real struggle for economic independence of this country began only after 1947. Through the years of Planning beginning 1950-51, I have no doubt that India has achieved a great deal in terms of development of the basic infrastructure not only of economic character, but even more importantly of social and political nature.

For a country which had stagnated for hundreds of years, for a nation which had been exploited by foreign rulers for a century and half, the achievements of the last 28 years since independence are no mean achievements. I like to stress this point because while being critical of what India has achieved in the last 28 years, we often tend to forget what the country was before independence. Every data that you have put together of Indian development between 1900-1950 and between 1950-1975 unquestionably underscores the point that we have made tremendous strides since 1950. I am not saying that what we have achieved is enough. Nor would I like to sit back and relax today.

Indeed, I am one of those who feel that the potential of this country is so much greater that we have but barely scratched the surface of it. I, therefore, feel that the period in which we are today is a great historic period, because the next few years will determine to a great extent what we will make of India as a nation. It will set the tone for Modern India's future. Many odds are undoubtedly against us. This is a country of tremendous diversity. This is a country which has many cultural strains. The land-man ratio is rather unfavourable and we have a large population. Yet, we have over the last two decades built up a magnificent set of varied linkages which has held the

nation together. Despite our many problems, there is a greater national identity. It is no mean achievement. Politically speaking, to keep together a nation of this size and of this diversity under a democratic system is a Herculean task. Political and social analysts have marvelled at the fact that India has thrived as a nation despite every possible prophesy made about it.

I have no doubt that despite many of our achievements we are still at a critical juncture in the Indian history. Critical juncture, not in terms of whether we will make it as a nation, for I have little doubt that we would. The question, however, is whether we will be able to make it through our social political system that we cherished so much. Unquestionably, the problems of poverty, of unemployment and socio-economic hardships which arise largely out of poverty which have mired the Indian politics in a morass of fairly serious dimension. It is a question in the minds of outsiders as well as those inside the country whether we will be able to build a strong nation which is based on fundamental human values; values in which every common citizen will be able to maintain his dignity and self-respect; whether he will have freedom from basic wants and a good measure of individual choice affecting his life. These are values which all great societies have cherished and have sought for themselves and their constituents.

When the choice is posed between having freedom and economic want, there are some who believe that economic wants come first; that unless we are able to prove to the rest of the world that we can look after our own people, provide them with basic essential things of life, such as food, clothing, shelter, health, education, etc. it is futile to talk in terms of the greater human values. These are indeed fundamental questions which every society has to face and I cannot say that the views which have been so expressed in terms of economic issues are wrong. But I do feel that in an evolution of human societies, it is not only freedom from economic wants, but genuine freedom of the

individual which alone constitutes the basic values around which great human civilizations and cultures can be built.

Having said that, it is of course incumbent upon us that we do, in the shortest amount of time before us, cater to the basic and core necessities of the people. We must be able to provide for the poor, for those who have lacked opportunities for a worthwhile living. We must build a society on reasonable social justice. We cannot for example allow wide disparities between the people who live at the top rungs of the socio-economic ladder and enable them to indulge in extravagant and conspicuous consumption and on the other hand have people who live in utter human degradation. It is a sight which you see as I do constantly around the country, where there are large pockets of dire poverty and of great economic distress. We cannot build a society of such gross human distortions and such human in-equalities. I am not suggesting that we should aim total equality which may or may not be possible. Nor is it perhaps an issue on which many will quarrel. But it is essential that we be able to maintain decent standards of human existence, to ensure reasonable levels of economic well being to most of our people so that they might be able to pursue the wider goals of mankind. In these wider goals are included the cultural spiritual and other great human values like freedom of expression. But to the hungry man who does not know when he will have his next meal all these concerns mean nothing and therefore we have got to come forward with a societal system in which there is a much greater real human freedom based on eradication of the basic socio-economic ills.

This is a question around which political debates in this country will continue for years to come. It is a debate around the legitimate expectation of the people of this country. As an operating political system, we must respond adequately to these issues. I have no doubt that these are concerns which you would have discussed a great deal while you have been here at this Institute. Education, to my mind, does not mean imbibing of mere technology.

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Techniques of how things should be done are useful and essential but they represent by themselves a very poor level of education. While we must strive to achieve the best of technology as to how to get things done, we must more importantly raise and discuss the basic issues around which the Indian society is to be built.

To all of you who are now graduating, India may perhaps look as a very messy and troubled society. Let me assure you that this is a phenomena which is confined not only to India but something which is at the moment characteristic of human societies all over the world. It is true not only in the western world where great issues of human civilization and of human society are being discussed perhaps in a different context, but also in many of the socialist countries where questions of human freedom, questions of the type of future societies needed are also being discussed. This is so for very good reasons. As man moves from one phase of civilization to another, the issue begin to grow more and more around the basic human values. These are the issues which are troubling not only us, but almost all other countries as well.

I am in fact not unhappy that these issues are troubling us, because it is only by focussing our attention to these problems that we might be able to find satisfactory answers to them. I am not saying that the answers will be easy to find. They will be very difficult indeed. In fact, the whole political process is nothing but an attempt to find answers to these questions, however, disorganised our political process may appear to you. The present situation is also a messy situation because there are conflicting ideologies and conflicting political opinions which are now being bandied around in the country. Every small issue becomes a matter of ideological discussion. Perhaps this is inevitable. Perhaps it is even desirable. I say so because we require a great deal of debate on issues which face the society. To the extent that these issues are discussed in the public within the citizen and the common people, it is part of the process of the political education

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of the country. I, therefore, welcome these debates and I do hope that you will also not only read about them, but actually participate in such political debates.

Behind all these debates are concerns as to the kind of society that we want to build. Concerns with the type of relationship we want to build between the State and the citizen, between society and its constituents. These are fundamental issues of social existence; of nationhood and nation building. These are issues around which man has fought for generations. These are the issues around which the future Indian nation has to be built.

Amidst all these also stand out opportunities the like of which we have never seen before. At no stage in the history of this country have there been so many opportunities for changing the Indian society from its backward economic status to a new order. I say this, because when we look at what India was soon after Independence, it is a totally different situation. Perhaps many of you are not sufficiently aware of the hard reality of India then. We have since then developed enormous economic and social infrastructures. It is possible to reach far corners of the country in reasonable time due to excellent rail, air, and road transportation. Telecommunications are relatively speaking far far better. It has been a period in which enormous and diverse opportunities for creative employment have been possible not only in trade which has been a traditional sphere of gainful employment for educated people earlier, but manufacturing and service industry as well which offer so much more varied careers. Educational backgrounds which earlier were not known in this country are increasingly becoming important avenues of gainful employment. Just take the illustration of electronics which until a few years ago was a frontier field meant only for the developed countries of the world. Today we have a large electronics industry. Our engineering graduates coming from the universities and advanced institutes are being employed in larger and larger numbers

in such newer industrial enterprises. This speaks well of the country, although I will agree with you that what we have done does not yet touch the full potential of the country.

This to my mind is a course of the development problem before us. It seems to me that in the ultimate analysis economic development mean the development of the man. It is not the iron and steel structures, it is not the beautiful buildings nor is it the various kind of industries that we create which are responsible for economic development. They are all essential, but they are only the means. Economic development is the basic development of the people who in the final analysis make for the strength or weakness of the nation. This is an aspect which I am afraid has not adequately been recognised. Too much emphasis is placed on the hardware of industrialization. I realise that the development of the man will not be enough; that he will have to be supported by many an instrument and institution.

Even so, if we have to provide one single focal point of development in all its dimensions, I would suggest that it should be the man. It is, therefore, gratifying to see that we have created educational and other related institutions in the society whose basic effort has been to develop the people. The real question is whether the men who are willing to build from the ground level are allowed to go further and pursue their goals unhindered. This determines to a large extent whether society moves forward or stagnates. We must, I feel create opportunities for young entrepreneurs, for people who have the capacity to create new activities and enterprises, for those who have the ability to create new economic situation and to help the process of economic change in the society. It is a common and unfortunate spectacle in the country to see how much of resourcefulness, initiative and enterprise of the people is snuffed out by manually conceived bureaucratism as if it is the sterile institutions which will deliver the goods

to the people. We have made regulation our prime gods rather than innovation and enterprise.

When I talk of entrepreneurship, I do not only mean private entrepreneurship which of course has a certain important role in India, but even more I am talking of the wider concept entrepreneurship, of innovative spirit which is so much important for this country. Innovations and innovativeness are necessary not only in private sector but even more importantly in the public sector, and in the government. After all the dominant economy in the Indian society is the public sector economy. Vast amount of national resources both men and material have been invested in these sectors. We simply cannot allow these to go bad. We cannot allow them to stagnate. We have got to utilize these national resources for the betterment of the nation. It is, however, not enough to talk of commanding heights of the economy to be under the governmental control. It must be made possible for people who operate these commanding heights to have much greater scope for initiative to develop their enterprises, to expand their activities beyond the narrow confines and allow them the freedom which alone will bring economic dividends to the society.

I am afraid while we have taken many important steps in recent years to enable several of these measures to be evolved, the entire social and administrative system which we have created does not yet help the best of innovative talent in this country. We must constantly, therefore, wage a fight in favour of these measures which free man from narrow and heavy shackles.

All of you here today have been the beneficiaries of one of the finest educational programmes in this country. I mean, not only the one at the Institute of Management, but also to the programme preceding it. The country has invested the best of its academic resources in you. I am sure you will be looking for attractive careers from now on if you have not already committed to specific jobs. While doing so

I hope you will keep in your mind, the issues which I raised today and the considerations of wider social and national interest. I am not suggesting that you refuse good jobs or opportunities. But do ask the question as to what is a good job. I am indeed suggesting that in accepting offers you ask yourself the question whether the kind of offer you are getting will respond in however a small measure to the types of problems which society has to face and the kind of problems which the society has to respond to. Whether in our small measure we can help the development of society in terms of the values we stand for. It is a small consideration to me to know that our management graduates are offered very high salaries. I knew that selling soap or cosmetics is a highly profitable business; that companies engaged in them enable senior executives to lead life styles which compare with their counterparts abroad. The question is, is this the purpose for which the nation has made so much investments in you? Could not careers which are more meaningful in terms of what they contribute to the development of the nation's social, economic and therefore political fibre more important?

It seems to me to be exceedingly important to ask the question not only how in management, but why? What is management all about? What are the values which you want to fight for? Are you merely going to fight for little larger piece of the cake which somebody else has baked? Or are you going to try to develop new things or if you want to say make a new cake? In other words, do you want to lead a comfortable, semi-parasitical life in which merely on the basis of our educational and academic attainments you live off the society without giving enough in return for it or will you be a part, however, small of building the social order which you think the country deserves.

I do hope that the values which you have imbibed here are the values not of mere monetary rewards. Mind you, I am not suggesting that you disregard this factor and take a vow

of poverty, By all means take the best that the situation offers. But let not the best mean a high start alone. There are many more aspects of a career. They must satisfy your wider creative urges and they must meet the values and aspirations of the Indian society today.

I also hope that at least some of you in the course of your careers will move out from mere jobs to the development of new enterprises. It is of critical importance to this nation to develop entrepreneurial base; to help small persons including the technologists and technocrats like some of you here to be able to set up your own units. To facilitate such development many important steps have been taken, some quite satisfactory and some not quite so satisfactory. Banks and financial institutions have come in a big way to help you in setting up your own units. Recently, the Industrial Finance Corporation has established the Risk Capital Foundation to enable small and medium entrepreneurs to start their own enterprises with the help of the foundation's equity support. These are important innovations. These are steps which indicate the country's great resolve to help you to stand on your own feet, and to enable you to play an important role in the national development. I do hope that limited as the services and facilities are today, some of you will try to take advantage out of them and pick up after some experience in industry, areas which will enable you set up your own enterprises.

Let me conclude by wishing you well. Let me also hope that you will go from here into careers and business and industry not only for short term personal gain, but even more so for playing a role in the development of the country in the directions in which the country wishes to go. It is no more enough to try to develop areas of our economy which merely bring profit to entrepreneurs. In whatever we invest the scarce resources of the country, it must have relevance to the needs of the Indian society today. It must contribute

to the wider goal of building a strong and free India. Andre Malraux once asked Prime Minister Nehru as to what he was trying to achieve in India. Pandit Nehru is reported to have said: "Building a just society with just means". It is an ideology worth your dedication.