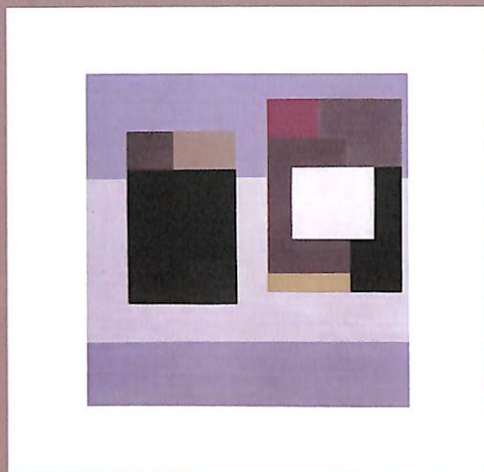


K K HANDIQUI MEMORIAL LECTURE

Welcome Address

July 20, 2015



Hitesh Deka, Ph D

Vice-chancellor

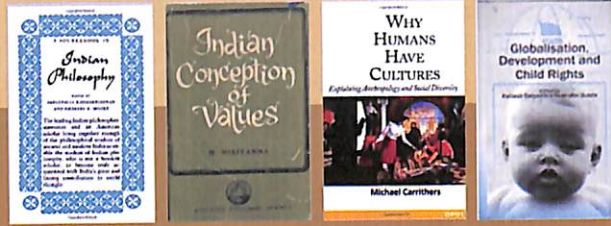
Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University

K K HANDIQUI MEMORIAL LECTURE

Vice Chancellor's Welcome Address

Today is a special day. We have a very special personality with us. The banks of the mighty Brahmaputra have witnessed a number of events that have shaped the course of Assam's history. This July evening, with a breeze that makes the summer tolerant, is surely to be moved by today's phenomenal gathering. We have with us none other than Kailash Satyarthi, the man whose efforts have been instrumental in saving the childhood of more than 84,000 innocent ones across the world. We are happy to be with him on this stage. And we sincerely thank him for allowing us an evening from his busy and meaningful schedule.

India's north-east has some distinct features. This University is interested in exploring these features. The University is well aware of these complexities and the enormous possibilities that are on offer. We are an Open University. As such, our learner base is huge and full of tremendous varieties – linguistic, cultural,



ethnographical, etc. We have several challenges to deal with as we are situated in one of the remote corners of the country. These challenges may lead towards extremely difficult problems, but as an institution of higher education we are committed to devise solutions. There are problems related to psychological disorientations, geographical separations, political deprivations and cultural complexities. This University has come forward to address all these issues.

In this era of globalization, we have little to hide and much to share. We are well aware of our strengths and weaknesses. Again, there emerges a frequent tendency to interpret our weaknesses as if they were handed over to us by some superior authority to make us suffer. This university rejects such interpretations. This University wants to convert the sphere of weakness into a sphere of shining strength. We believe that this can only be possible when we come forward with a strategic back-up.

The taste of freedom and the responsibility that this very notion of freedom inherently carries will be one of the core areas that the university community desires to uphold against all odds. The University believes in all sorts of freedom constitutionally granted to her citizens in this great democratic country. There may be thousands of interpretations of freedom, but freedom to live in the early phase of human life in a protected manner is a major challenge. Society cannot run away from ensuring to its young members these particular modes of freedom: freedom to live, freedom to have education and freedom to keep one's mind and body away from all types of exploitation. This is indeed difficult to achieve. This is not difficult because we are ignorant of the necessity of these freedoms, but we are indifferent to sharing and to extending these dimensions of freedom so far as those helpless, insecure children are concerned.

The great Indian pronouncement, the Vedas, were well aware of the necessities of freedom. This great tradition even encouraged the human mind to respect the freedom of the so called innate beings. That Thou Art – the English rendering of the most famous uttering of the Vedic Rishis is

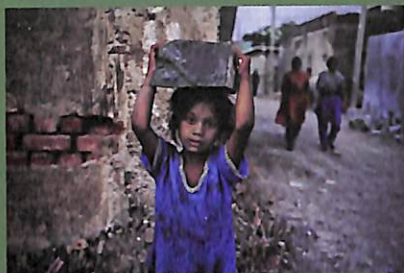
a clear indicator of more than human consideration often encountered in the Vedas. It is a vision that includes the view that whatever God has created to make His world beautiful, meaningful and useful for mortals like us is to be respected and to be treated as if they were parts of our soul. We the human beings have no right to disturb the peace and tranquillity of the world around us. Therefore, we must render our services and seek to live in harmony with all those worldly things that lie around us. This is obviously an idealistic position, but it reflects the capacity of our imagination to serve all those whose very existence is inherently related with us.

Globalization has left little scope for such idealistic endeavours to engage our minds. Instead it leads to the exploitation of all the resources for our benefit. *Benefit* is certainly in these days not a benevolent word. But originally *benefit* was viewed as a domain of interests in which every one was secure, our spiritual needs often found a position in the domain of the idea of benefit. But globalization has transformed this word into a harsh one, where exploitation becomes the only face of the word *benefit*.

Human resources are the principal ingredient in determining the course of development.

But to devise strategies to construct human resources for a meaningful economic and social purpose is one of the hardest tasks to accomplish. An open university realises this difficulty and as such it makes considerable efforts to create an efficient and effective human resource pool.

One of the basic questions that the anthropologist asks is: how do we live together? This question calls for a deep and transforming reflection on ourselves as individuals. Anthropologists most of the time insist that such reflections must include our mutual, shared lives as well. We simply could not live, could not continue our existence as humans, without sociality. As Maurice Godelier reminds us, "human beings, in contrast to other social animals, do not just live in society, they produce society in order to live." We cannot delve deep into ourselves except by knowing ourselves in relation to others. The question 'How do we associate with each other?' leads to abundance of answers.



Every answer has a specific feature reflecting the great field of human social and cultural diversity. The University understands the significance of this question and through its Self Learning Materials (SLM) tries to introduce a new psychological orientation among its learners to respect values that will pave a way for our future generations to live in a better world. As our esteemed guest Sjt. Kailash Satyarthi reminds us :

We need to understand that an increase in the well being of the poor will take place only with the protection and enhancement of their environmental, social and skill related assets, and any development plans made need to be futuristic keeping these factors in mind. Development plans exclude the main objects of change.

The University visualizes itself as a catalyst in the development process and also considers itself as the product of the very process. Therefore it realizes the main objectives of the process of change. For that reason, the University aspires to become a think tank that can serve the intellectual and the emotional needs of all members of the society. It is one of the main objectives of Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University to reach out to the masses so that the under privileged and the deprived sections of the society can experience a sense of freedom to enjoy its capabilities: freedom to explore the huge possibilities that development efforts carry and the knowledge that can be gathered to lead a better livelihood.

India's north-east has a remarkable cultural harmony. Our people believe in the process of exchange, respect for others and the need of accommodating other ideologies. All these have introduced multi-layered interpretations into our psyche. Our community life is one of the bright examples to sense our richness in areas of tolerance and mutual respect.

May I again quote from Sjt. Satyarthi :

The homogenisation of culture, which is taking place is destroying the diversity of culture, traditional values and systems. It affects lifestyles, livelihood patterns, agriculture and even food habits. Globalisation has entered and affected almost all aspects of our lives, and we need to find a way to ensure that its benefits accrue to all sections of society. The time has come for all well meaning and educated people to come together in a unified force and demystify knowledge and take it among the masses.

As the vice-chancellor, I have the pleasure to inform this august gathering that the

University has already acted to serve the ethnic communities of the state in their cultural and linguistic domain. Our 'Mukali Mat Binimoy' – Open Opinion exchange - held on 17 May, 2015 is the maiden effort in the field of higher education of the state in this direction.

Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University desires to serve the deprived and the marginalised sections of the society. Our mission statement carries this position. Our huge learner base demonstrates the utility of our efforts, of mechanisms that we follow and of the innovative strategies that we have built-up over the years. It is definitely one of the success stories to be highlighted. But as an institution of higher education we are well aware of our responsibilities and the expectation generated in the society. We have already revealed our concern for the ethnic communities, problems they encounter and the linguistic difficulties that have been arising over the past few decades.

We want to expand our goal of social responsibility by elevating ourselves as an institution which will create a young and dynamic human resource base that will listen to the innocent voices that

remain unheard.

May I again quote Sjt. Satyarthi's few lines :

Solutions are not found only in the deliberations in conferences and prescriptions from a distance. They lie in small groups and local organisations and individuals, who confront the problem every day, even if they remain unrecognised and unknown to the world.

Our University shares the same view, shares the same concern. It desires to minimize the burden felt by most innocent members of the society, children forced to live as child-labour. It serves them in various forms. It seeks to inculcate in the minds of its learners the thought that depriving a child from having education, enjoying the rights is one of the worst crimes.

The University desires to serve and protect atleast some of these children using financial resources from its proposed *Mother Teresa Social Welfare Mission*. The University community will definitely extend whatever co-operation possible to any initiative taken by any authority, organization, individual to protect the rights of these deprived children.

We are very happy that you have come to open our eyes, to make us aware of one of the worst crimes of human history – to deprive children of their innocent childhood and bury these dreams in deep ground. You encourage us to act for creating a safe and pleasant world for them.

The great Indian tradition does not lack values to protect our children. Gandhiji's famous principle of *Last person First* is the most democratic way available to address issues of our immediate concern. Let me quote from Professor Arun Kumar, the famous compiler of *Alternative Budgets*:

If this principle can be implemented in the country, then the goal of social justice and equity is achievable. However, all these require extensive movements, including on the rights of children. A more democratic dispensation would increase investments in rural development, education, health and agricultural development which will benefit children.

Sjt. Satyarthi in his moving Nobel lecture coined the expression –the sound of silence. His words reflect the qualities of a dedicated poem:

I represent here the sound of silence. The cry of innocence. And, the face of invisibility. I have come here to share the voices and dreams of our children, because they are all our children.

Development efforts need to be concentrated on the welfare of these young, unprotected and innocent members of the society. A university as a think tank must include this expectation from development efforts in its domain of concern. As the university serves and moulds the young, unaided minds of the society, it has every reason to act as the platform for creating consciousness among its learners in particular and as a public organization in the broader social spectrum in general to devise practical ways to protect our nascent members.

It is a privilege for the University community that Sjt. Satyarthiji is going to address this gathering with the title 'Role of Youth in Protecting World's Left out Children' which aptly suits University's guiding principles. The banks of the mighty Brahmaputra have always been benefited by gracious presence of eminent personalities down the ages, enriching its sweeping currents with their wisdom. Sjt. Satyarthiji presence this evening will surely enlarge our horizon, enlighten our spirit and increase our wisdom.

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