

Your Vice-Chancellor Speaks...



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Aka

Kanchi University

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On

Challenges and Opportunities

Respected Registrar, Deans, Members of the Academic Council, Heads of Departments, Fellow Faculty Colleagues, Staff of this great institution, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Pranams to Pujoyasri Sankaracharya Swamiji of the Great Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam. Gurubyo Namah.

I deem it a great honour and privilege, to be with you and present my second oration. Since the time I joined this great institution, I had a lot of opportunity to understand the nature and functioning of this institution. My colleagues at the apex level of administration have been extremely helpful in my attempt to understand this great institution. Kindly permit me to thank each one of them. Prof G Srinivasulu, Prof

Ramana Kumar, Prof Sriram, Prof Balaji, Prof Murthy, Prof Pisipathi, Shri Ramakrishnan, to name a few. I visited departments; I interacted with research scholars. It is an enriching experience, to say the least.

Besides, let me congratulate all of you for contributing significantly towards the growth of this great institution. I can now envision an excellent and exciting future for all of us.

When I gave my oration last month at the time of taking charge as Vice Chancellor, I mentioned two things; look for problems around you; attempt inter-disciplinary research to solve those problems. My interactions with everyone and my visits to various departments confirm my belief that it is eminently feasible. There are enough

problems that are around you and you can solve them through inter-disciplinary approach.

Before I proceed further, I would like to record that we have close to 200 faculty, equal number of support staff, and close to 4500 students. Several lakhs square feet of built up space provide impressive living space and learning environment. However, growth is always a factor that *drives* the institution. Of course, quality *defines* the institution. As we look 10 years ahead many growth opportunities present themselves. The question is,

“How do we prioritise?”

“How do we prepare ourselves?”

I must acknowledge some of the things I saw during my visits. Excellent collection of books in Sanskrit and Philosophy, Rare collection of

manuscripts, demonstration of usefulness to industry through innovative lubricants, and a desire to delve deep in to new materials with application focus. I am sure these are just a few that caught my attention. There must be more. However, certain action points did emerge during the last four weeks and I would like to share them with you.

Extreme Automation:

An institution such as ours requires automation in all dimensions of our activity. The main reason is that automated system gives us accurate data for planning, besides making day to day life easy.

The face of the university is our web presence. These days we are known more through the cyber space than in physical reality. We started the exercise of documenting our *workflow* and

information flow. We are also fortunate that we get professional help in this matter.

Online interaction is dominant in our lives. To cope with it, we are going to establish a state of the art digital infrastructure that will enable millions of flows. We plan to use it to integrate faculty from all over the world with our regular curricula.

In fact we plan to capture the entire life cycle of the student as an electronic flow. It will enable the student and their parent to get “current” information at all times. They can be in sync dynamically. Of course all the fancy terminologies that one hears such as AI, ML, Big Data, and Data Science will be in play and that too in full vigour as we move forward.

To enable extreme automation we need a Digital Infrastructure par excellence. Creating such an infra is an art! But an enjoyable one for the curious mind. Going through the process of creation is always a “Godly” experience. I welcome you all to participate, enjoy, and experience Digital Bliss, if I can call it! Knowing this area of Digital Infra creation rather intimately, I can assure you that it happens very rarely in one’s life. By God’s Grace I had the experience more than once in my life; I want you to experience it as well.

However, I must forewarn you...

While the change of such dimension takes place, an organisation goes through extremely *challenging* times; but believe me - it is a rare *opportunity*.

Our Ranking

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In any environment it is customary to evaluate the elements that make up the environment and for doing so one should have a clear set of parameters identified. For example, if you want to know who is the tallest person in this room, you need to measure the height of each one. The highest number that you find and the person associated with that number will be declared (and accepted by everyone) as the tallest. This is no rocket science! But when the parameters are many, the number of entities in the environment that can “qualify” based on such comparison, will automatically become less and less. It is taught in law schools as “natural law”. This is also known as “ranking”. Ranking is quite useful in policy

making and for creating peer groups or classes that can take on greater challenges for greater good of the environment itself. Those who do not “fit in” are normally left to fend for themselves in this wonderful world, as it has the capability to accommodate entities of all hues.

When you practice the “comparative” measure with humans there is a “sentimental” reaction; but when you do the same with organisations, there is readjustment and progress. Humans see a short horizon and expect protection from environment, which may or may not be capable! Whereas the organisations attempt to compete before giving up or withering away. This is a deep subject; but not an insurmountable one. Reason is individuals, if they decide, can do wonders; but surprisingly organisations cannot. Because, they have to depend on individuals!

Perhaps that is the reason why Bhagwan says in Bhagwat Gita and I give my approximate translation...

Lift yourself; Lift your inner self; You are your friend; You are your enemy... and so on.

That shloka depicts the power of a human being. Organisations do not have such power; instead they try to derive the power from the humans that make an organisation. Human is a natural entity; organisation is an artificial entity. The natural entity has the power to adjust to the environmental demands; Survival of the fittest. An organisation can compete only if it is made of of the “fittest”; that too oriented towards the same direction which is the goal of the organisation. Random vectors, however powerful do not count

in a system; but Vectors with Coherent Synergy is unbeatable.

Why am I saying all this? We, as an organisation or institution or university, live in an environment where comparisons using multiple parameters is the natural order; peer comparison and relative ranking tends to define the very existence. Many actions of our stakeholders depend on the perceptions formed out of such comparisons. As I mentioned earlier, the University depends on each one of you, to be seen as the Top Most in the Country and the World. We have the potential; but by your sheer work we convert the potential energy to kinetic energy and surface in the ranking hierarchy right to the top. Once you are there, you decide the rules of the game!

How can you help?

How can you participate?

It is simple. Just do your duty well. Teach well. Prepare very good notes of your lessons. Try to teach every individual in the classroom. Solve problems in your area of expertise in such a way that the entire world knowledge moves forward by a few millimetres at least. Publish. Patent. Innovate. Create digital repositories as you go forward. Be a trail blazer. When each one of you do this, the organisation moves to a different orbit. Things follow automatically; new buildings; new laboratories; more students; that too bright ones; more faculty colleagues; more courses; new subjects; inter-disciplinary experience; well the list is endless.

While the change of such dimension takes place, an organisation goes through extremely

challenging times; and you go through professionally challenging times; work harder; move away from 9 to 5 routine; become a 24 x 7 researcher voluntarily - not because I demand it, but because you love it. But believe me - it is a rare *opportunity*.

Perspective Plan

A perspective plan is based on vision; not of an individual but the individuals that make up the organisation. Of course, an individual, such as the one in my position acts a single point contact and coordination. The Board of Management appreciates the vision and therefore approves it. When the Board of Management approves it, they commit resources at their command to realise the vision. It is an important role that only Board can play; we as individuals cannot.

With my limited understanding spanning four weeks and based my experience in academia and administration spanning four decades, I formulated the following vision which will help you rediscover yourselves and participate in the evolution of this great University in to a Universal Learning Space (ULS). Some of them are:

- Smart Campus
- Gymnasium and Sports facility
- Inter-Departmental Courses
- Work flow automation
- Moral and ethics courses
- Hostels Facelift; facilities, kitchen,
- Campus to be free of plastics

- Zero waste campus
- Design for Zero Maintenance (DZM) thematic courses
- Parking facilities and Tags for all vehicles
- Modern Network and Digital Infra
- Learning from our Indian tradition and culture, which is a source of Saswathaisvaryam

Each one can engage in any one of those activities for lifetime. But the divine grace that guides this institution will continue to be in play to accelerate and make it happen. The institution is a Blessed ULS. We as members of the institution are Blessed. Kaarunyam, when combined with Thaarunyam will work wonders. Experience it.

From Zero to Infinity in Ten Years...

During our discussions two things appeared fun, research, and useful; all at the same time. They are:

Clean washrooms (CWR)

Crisp Dosas (CD)

Obviously everyone was keen and interested. You understand both. You have a definition in your mind. No need to elaborate.

While discussing the one liner for requirement specification for CWR the following emerged.

Clean, Dry, and Smell-free.

Everyone felt it should be automated. Civil engineering said they can work on “*Manhattan Pipeline*” structure. Mechanical Engineering said that they can work on *flow, direction control, and*

pressure. Mechatronics said that they can take care of *motor controls electronically*. Electronics and Instrumentation said that they can handle the *sensors and instrumentation*. Computer Science said that they can convert the algorithms in to programs that execute on computers, and fuse the data from sensors such as pressure and temperature and all other sources for decision making. In one hour everyone in the room forgot the artificial barriers called Departments (yours and mine) and focused on the problem to be solved! I for one said that I am the Angel Investor in whatever you want to experiment with; but give me patentable Intellectual Property! I must admit that I am enormously influenced by Parsi-Gujarathi thinking, from the days I set foot in this world to earn a livelihood!

See what could happen in one hour! Amazing. And it is all done by you. You have tremendous capability. Remember... Latent and Talent are anagrams, by the way...

Crisp Dosa was an Ice Breaker. The careful exterior (I don't know this VC; may be he is laying a trap here attitude) that everyone was maintaining, suddenly vanished. Subject is interesting as well as inviting. Already it was 7 PM. Hunger was within. Everyone was actually seeing a Crisp Dosa in front of them - that too served by a machine that they made! Power of individual imagination. Again everyone in the room swung in to action; ideas poured; offers on the table like in the CWR case; The ease and uncanny accuracy made me confident. Again I am the Angel Investor...

Now CWR and CD are here to stay as projects!
Fully funded. Be my guest. Come with your
students. Let us brainstorm the ideas. Get to
actual action.

Journey begins...

Zero to Infinity...

The question that is perhaps uppermost in
everyone's mind is:

“Is it possible at all?”

Ohh... we have seen Vice-Chancellors come and
go. This is yet another rhetoric.

Well I believe in zero and infinity. I believe in
zero because Indian discovered it. It is I our
scriptures; it is Soonya; I believe in Infinity
because that is absolute; that is where we go;
Poornath Poornam Idham...

The question in front of all of us is how to go from zero to infinity as we understand in the world around us. These are two representations indicative of “less and less” and “more and more”.

Every step that each one of us take in the growth direction will set the University apart from the rest of the pack. Kindly propose the changes as you see them. Participate. I am a good listener. But I have a questioning tendency! Not for inhibiting but for enabling.

Let us grow together.

I believe in you. I trust you all.

JAIHIND.