

FULL TEXT OF THE 8TH CONVOCATION ADDRESS DELIVERED BY
THE HON'BLE CHIEF JUSTICE OF INDIA, SHRI JUSTICE N.V. RAMANA
AT NATIONAL LAW UNIVERSITY DELHI

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I am very happy to address this gathering on the occasion of the Eighth Convocation. Before I begin my address, I would like to congratulate the students who are graduating today. It marks the culmination of a phase of learning. Let me also congratulate you on becoming part of an immensely challenging, intellectually stimulating and incredibly satisfying profession.

It is appropriate to quote Justice Chagla here, I quote:

“The legal profession is a great calling and it is a learned and noble profession. Remember always that it is a profession. It is not a trade or business. The distinction between the two is deep and fundamental. In business, your sole object is to make money. In the legal profession making money is merely incidental.” Unquote.

The Father of our nation, Mahatma Gandhi, once remarked “*Youth are agents for transformation*”. The history of modern India would be incomplete without acknowledging the role played by students and youth of this country.

Many social revolutions and changes were brought about through politically conscious and socially responsible students, who raised their voice against existing inequities. Students have been the face of the Indian independence movement. In fact, the youth have often taken-up certain causes and inspired many political parties to take up the same subsequently.

Education has a social agenda. The agenda is to develop our human resources which meet the requirements of society. An educated citizenry is the greatest asset for any democratic society. Students are known for their readiness to fight for all the right causes because their thoughts are pure and honest. They are always in the forefront, questioning injustice.

Any keen observer of Indian society would notice that in the past few decades no big leader has emerged from the student community. This appears to be correlated with diminished participation of students in social causes after liberalization. The importance of students’ participation in modern democracy cannot be played down.

It is necessary for you to take part in current debates. You must have a clear vision. It is essential that more and more well-meaning, forward-looking, and upright students like you enter public life. You must emerge as leaders. After all, political consciousness and well-informed debates can steer the nation into a glorious future as envisioned by our Constitution. A responsive youth is vital for strengthening democracy.

It is therefore necessary for students to realise the importance of their relationship with society. Students are an integral part of society. They cannot live in isolation. Students are guardians of freedom, justice, equality, ethics, and social equilibrium. All this can be achieved only when their energies are properly streamlined.

When the youth become socially and politically conscious, the basic issues of education, food, clothing, healthcare, shelter, etc. would come into focus in the national discourse. The educated youth cannot remain aloof from social reality. You have a special responsibility.

Consider this: nearly one fourth of our population still lacks access to basic education. Only about 27% of those in the age group of university students are enrolling for university education. While most of you leave these institutes with degrees and titles, always be aware of the world that you are a part of. You cannot remain self-centered. Do not allow narrow and partisan issues to dominate the nation's thought process. This will ultimately hurt our democracy and the progress of our nation.

The youth of today is driven by idealism and ambition. Idealism without ambition may not achieve any positive results. Ambition without idealism can be dangerous. Combine the two in the right proportion and enable our country to emerge as one of the most powerful and harmonious nations.

The learnings of my generation were different. In addition to formal learning in school and college the tough circumstances taught us many valuable lessons. When we left college in search of livelihood the change was not abrupt. There was freedom for us to experiment, work, play and learn from society.

Unfortunately, the focus nowadays is on professional courses to the total neglect of equally important subjects such as humanities and natural sciences. In an anxiety to secure highly remunerative and profitable job opportunities, children are sent to exile in privately run residential schools and coaching centers. The formative years of budding talents are spent in a suffocating atmosphere which unfortunately resembles prisons. Holistic development of a child cannot be achieved in such a restrictive environment. The harsh reality is that even after the students enter professional universities, the focus is on classroom learning, and not on the world beyond the classroom. I am not sure, who or what is to blame for these changes.

My general observations on the power and responsibility of students and the youth, are even more relevant when it comes to all of you who are graduating today. You are all law graduates of one of the premier law universities in the country. All of you have a special responsibility to society.

Talking of National Law Universities, I thought it would be relevant to highlight something that I find a little troubling. The primary object behind the establishment of National Law Universities in the country was to improve the quality of legal education in the country to produce better trained legal professionals. However, no authoritative study has been conducted to

determine whether this has taken place. Additionally, due to various considerations most students from these universities end up in corporate law firms. Even though such law firms are an integral part of the legal landscape of the country, it is unfortunate that a comparable addition is not being made to the ranks of lawyers practicing in Courts from the National Law Universities. This is perhaps one of the reasons why National Law Universities are perceived as elitist and detached from social realities.

You must remember, that as a practicing advocate you will interact with a far wider cross-section of the society as compared to being a lawyer working in a corporate law firm.

You will be able to spend your time and efforts on causes that you are passionate about. You will be able to fight battles in Court relating to various social issues. An enrichment of Courtroom advocacy is the need of the hour and is something that the profession must think about collectively. I urge all the stakeholders to consider this issue and come up with a solution.

Lawyers cannot be strangers to socio-economic and political realities. With countless tools at your disposal, all the knowledge and information in the world a click away, you are in a privileged position. While it is not wrong to choose a life of convenience, I hope that you choose a life of service as well, for the future of this nation.

You must reflect on the role you can play in the social enrichment and transformation of the nation. *Only such introspection leads to development of necessary strength of character and conviction of belief.*

Be aware of prevailing inequities and ask yourselves, can I be a part of the solution? Particularly, in a country like India, you need to be social architects. The legal profession is not about profit maximisation. It is a service to your client. Remember your duty to the Court and to the law. Carry out your sacred task with utmost sincerity and honour.

Learning of law is in three parts - as a student, as a professional and in real life. After leaving this beautiful campus, do not get shocked when you see the conditions outside. Court rooms are not like those represented in movies or moot courts. Cramped courtrooms, judges sitting on broken chairs, stenographers and court masters having to attend Court without adequate arrangements, absence of restrooms, etc. would be a common sight.

In this profession, clients will not come searching for you. Success will not arrive at your doorstep. You have to remain patient and carry on.

I do not want to terrorize you as you are embarking on your professional life. These are simply words of caution. I just want you to be aware of what you are getting into.

I want you to be ready for the above challenges. I am sure you will all be able to overcome these early difficulties. I want you to combine the reality you will face outside this campus, with the theories and ideas that you have learnt at the university to creatively remedy the existing situation. Always be alive to the harsh realities of the world, particularly the suffering of millions of people in the country. Never compromise on your principles.

When you enter the profession you will take an oath on the Constitution. Always remember your solemn duty to uphold the Constitution. You all are aware, independence of the judiciary is sacrosanct in ensuring the rule of law. As officers of the Court, you must always guard the institution during testing times. You must always remain vigilant about possible attacks. This is our collective responsibility towards the Constitution.

It is for you to shape the future of this country. The opinions you write, policies you draft, pleadings and submissions that you file in Court and the ethics that you hold dear, will have a far-reaching effect.

As the former US President John F. Kennedy famously said, and I quote:

“Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country”. Unquote.

Today is also a proud occasion for this University and the faculty. In its short existence, National Law University Delhi has firmly established itself as one of the best institutions of advanced learning and research in the country. I am particularly impressed by the fact that NLUD has many research centres engaged in high-quality rigorous academic and empirical research. Its research has been cited both nationally and internationally.

On this occasion, it is only proper for us to recall the services of all those who built this institution brick by brick.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has been a pillar of strength for this institution. I am told he honours every request that is made in the interest of this institution. He is known for his commitment and hard work for the welfare of the people of Delhi. His work in the field of education and health care are highly appreciated.

Brother Justice D.N. Patel, as Chancellor of this University is guiding the University and is extending all necessary help to make it a centre of excellence. The presence of Brother Justices Siddharth Mridul and Rajneesh Bhatnagar, is highly encouraging for the student community.

I congratulate the entire National Law University Delhi team led by Professor Srikrishna Deva Rao, the Vice Chancellor. Under his leadership, the students of this University have won many national and international laurels.

While I heartily congratulate those who distinguished themselves with special laurels today, I want to tell the rest of you that your contributions to the profession and the society are going to be no less important. If I may add, I also belonged to your league at the time of my graduation.

Once again, I congratulate each of you and I wish you success in all your future endeavours. God bless you and have a happy and meaningful life ahead.
