

**Speech at the Ninth Convocation, GNLU**

**by**

**Hon'ble Dr Justice Dhananjaya Y Chandrachud,  
Judge, Supreme Court of India**

Good morning ~~[Insert dignitaries' names]~~ and hearty congratulations to the proud graduates of the batches of 2017 and 2018 and to all those of you present today who have played instrumental roles in the journeys of these resplendent graduates! I am deeply grateful for being granted the opportunity to participate in this glorious day of your lives and as you commence the next step of your journey, let me extend a warm welcome to all of you into our noble profession.

Your degree symbolises a milestone in your journey - as lawyers, as professionals and as human beings. Today of all days might be a good day for each of you to reflect on this journey - remember your seventeen or eighteen year self where, perhaps, securing good marks in the board exams was your greatest aspiration to now where many of you have already entered workspaces and had

a taste of what the real world looks like - dealing with bosses, clients, deadlines and expectations.

That being said, I do not believe that this occasion is limited to just signifying that you have now officially been vested with a degree. Albert Einstein famously said “Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school.” Your five years at law school have taught you the values of perseverance and resilience and significant incidents and experiences in this beautiful campus have shaped you to be who you are today – and all of this is a lot more valuable than just being certified as a graduate on paper. I do not think it would be amiss for me to say that in addition to the skills, knowledge and the much venerated “wisdom” that we all seek to gain with the passage of time, for many of you law school has been the place where you discovered yourself and found lasting friendships and love that are going to be the foundation of lifelong companionship and an enormous source of joy.

As you continue this journey, today of all days might be a good day to also count your blessings. While there is no dearth of talent in our country, there are disturbing inequalities and disparities in access to opportunities including access to education. Many do not have access to basic primary education. You are very fortunate to receive not only primary education, but also an excellent undergraduate education that very few have access to - not only exposing you to the wrongs and injustices in society but also equipping you with the tools to try and change it. Make use of your education and the fruits that come with it to the benefit of those who do not have the means to do the same. Aspire to build an inclusive future, an equal future.

Every time a child is denied basic education because of her parent's financial status- a muslim is denied housing because of her religion- a person engaged in manual scavenging is denied basic human rights- **Every single time** a woman is denied access to public spaces because of her menstrual status, a Dalit is subjected to

indignity- each of these instances is a glaring example of the society's inability to grant her citizens an equal and humane existence. And this inequality is what you have to strive to decimate. The Constitution envisions an egalitarian society- but it is the citizens and particularly students like you who can make this constitutional vision a reality.

Studying at a National Law School has allowed you interactions with persons from diverse regional, cultural and economic backgrounds - an opportunity to broaden your horizons. Law schools have also been instrumental in changing the face of the legal profession by providing opportunities to students who need not be from a family of lawyers . This fresh infusion of talent from diverse backgrounds brings a certain sense of inclusivity to a profession which is often regarded as exclusionary. Though there has been significant progress, we have a long way to go before the legal profession can be considered completely democratic and equitable.

From my interactions with students (many of whom come to work at my Chambers), there seem to be many reasons behind students choosing to pursue law :

- I. some discover their calling for law even before they enter adulthood (and this never ceases to amaze me)
- II. Some go to law school without any clue about what the study and practice of law entails and that is perfectly alright for youngsters at that age, and then through your five years at law school you discover a love for the law or some particular branch of the law (maybe it's third year maybe it's fifth year).
- III. And there is another category and I must confess is my favourite - the social justice warriors, the ones who aspire to redress societal problems through the law: Some people come to law school to learn about how law impacts people and hope that they might learn to use the new skills and knowledge gained at law school to transform and restructure the world and its law to make the world a more just place. While law school

17 yr old  
Kansas

teaches you a lot, legal theory cannot always capture the nuanced manifestations of justice and injustice in society. You will have to learn most of this on your own during your tryst with the legal profession.

Having first been a litigator and now a part of the judiciary, I sincerely hope that some of you choose to enter the profession as advocates or as judges. I am aware that the journey entails a fair share of challenges but if pursued with the right amount of heart and rigour, I promise that it will prove to be a fulfilling one.

There are also students who decide that they do not envisage a career practising law. Today, there are diverse options available to law graduates- legal journalism, academia, policy, politics- the possibilities are endless. And that's alright as well - while the education you have received has laid a strong foundation for a successful career in the law, it has prepared you for a lot more <sup>than</sup> that. Your education has equipped you with important life skills which make you a valuable asset wherever you go. The beauty of legal

education is that it enables you to think critically, develop problem solving skills, hone linguistic skills and more importantly, I think the rigours of your course have prepared you to deal with pressures and deadlines. All these skills make you a befitting choice for various career avenues not limited to the law.

Each of you bears the potential to contribute immensely – be it as a litigator, a firm based lawyer, an academic or maybe an altogether different career path, depending on where you steer the course of your life. As young graduates, you possess an immense power to change this country, to change the world provided you allow yourselves to realize your potential. Do not permit societal notions of what constitutes as practical or quixotic, to detract you from pursuing whatever it is you feel your calling lies in. After all, we make ourselves according to the ideas we have of our possibilities. This reminds me of an insightful exchange between Alice and the Mad Hatter in Alice in Wonderland. The Mad Hatter once asked

"Have I gone mad?"

And Alice, wise beyond her years, said : "I'm afraid so. You're entirely bonkers. But I'll tell you a secret. All the best people are."

Regardless of what you choose, I wish and hope that you will lead happy and fulfilling lives. Sometimes in our insatiable quest for attaining success in the face of competition and our focus on larger goals, we tend to undermine the importance of smaller quotidian choices. Jeff Bezos: "Cleverness is a gift, kindness is a choice." Be kind to others but also be kind to yourself. Self love is as much a part of self-improvement. Do not rob yourself of the kindness you deserve. The journey of every individual is different, and you won't all achieve success the same way. Just like you have shaped your path to graduation in a way that is uniquely and undeniably yours, your journey here onwards must bear the same imprint of uniqueness and individuality.

It is of relevance to mention that the legal landscape has undergone a sea of change over the last few decades.



~~(Give personal anecdotes and examples on how the~~ practice of law has changed significantly since your times- <sup>five year courses in</sup> law schools, <sup>new</sup> new pedagogical approaches and new methodologies of legal research databases and other technological advances have ushered in massive change) - the legal world is poised to change even more radically in the coming years with the advent of technology.

Your growth and your relevance in the advanced society we are surging fast toward is dependent only in the effort you put in toward your own development. Read and read beyond. Make yourselves holistic lawyers. Build the foresight necessary in today's present. If you accept the task of reinventing yourself constantly, you will emerge far more gallantly in the face of a challenge than you would otherwise. A life-long commitment to self-improvement now will also help you ascertain and achieve that mental balance necessary in making yourself more adaptive to change. Bon Jovi famously said "Map your future but do it in pencil."

I've noticed a malignancy that seems to affect many : cynicism and I have some words to offer on this subject (not mine I must humbly admit):

*“Don’t just resist cynicism — fight it actively. Unlike critical thinking, that pillar of reason and necessary counterpart to hope, it is inherently uncreative, unconstructive, and spiritually corrosive...Like all forms of destruction, cynicism is infinitely easier and lazier than construction. There is nothing more difficult yet more gratifying in our society than living with sincerity and acting from a place of largehearted, constructive, rational faith in the human spirit, continually bending toward growth and betterment. This remains the most potent antidote to cynicism. Today, especially, it is an act of courage and resistance.”*

Another great antidote to prevent succumbing to cynicism is to continually seek out what magnifies your spirit. Author Patti Smith, in discussing her creative influences, talks about writers and artists who magnified her spirit. Identify the people, ideas, and books that magnify your spirit and visit them often.

"So many of us choose our path out of fear disguised as practicality... You can fail at what you don't want. So you might as well take a chance on doing what you love." And remember that "A head full of fears has no space for dreams."

In addition to working towards fulfilling our own dreams, it is important to keep working towards creating a world where each individual has an opportunity to chase their dreams. While we all have our share of challenges, the problem is exacerbated for marginalised groups who face numerous challenges which obstruct the fulfilment of their dreams. Women for example, and I choose this example because it constitutes one half of our population - have to deal with shocking gender wage gaps, forms of violence and harassment, forced adherence to femininity, impossible standards of beauty, compounded by what I think this might be the worse of them all - insensitivity to women's rights and issues. As men and as human beings—it is vital that we show compassion and empathy ~~thought~~ for those around us.

The fight for gender equality cannot be fought by women alone. Men have a key role to play in demanding and supporting this societal shift by being a part of the conversation and of the movement. As you leave your university with a lot of idealism in your heart and enter workspaces, it is important to carry forward these values to these spaces as well. The deconstruction of stereotypes and gender roles is a continuous process and must be practiced every passing day - for these notions are so stubbornly embedded in our social systems. It is of relevance to recognize that our gender, like many other social markers of identity, is an inadvertent, or sometimes, even advertent beneficiary of the operation of parochial values which unfortunately continue to dictate social life in our country. The same values which grant privilege to some, and rob others of their humanity. There is an urgent need to address this- and if you choose to remain a beneficiary and do nothing, you are complicit in furthering a grave injustice. Your generation is the one with all the ideas accompanied with the resolve to make the world a much better and egalitarian place. I would like to conclude with

the following words of Henry Haskins: "*What lies behind us and what lies ahead of us are small matters compared to what lies inside of us.*"

Thank you.