

# PROF. M. S. SWAMINATHAN'S SPEECH

## Recipient of Doctor of Letters On April 9, 2013

Hon'ble Vice President of India, Dr Hamid Ansari, Hon'ble Chancellor, Hon'ble Vice Chancellor, Members of the Senate and Council, Deans and Directors, Faculty, Outgoing Alumni and their parents, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very grateful to the authorities of the North Maharashtra University for conferring the Honorary D.Litt Degree on me. Within a short span of time, this University has earned an enviable reputation for its emphasis on academic excellence and social relevance in all its educational and research programmes. North Maharashtra is experiencing an unprecedented drought and even drinking water is becoming a chemical curiosity. Parts of Maharashtra have always experienced periodic droughts and several excellent drought relief and water management programmes have been developed in this State. Nevertheless, with the onset of the era of climate change, extreme weather events like drought and floods are likely to become more frequent. Therefore this University has to develop a pro-active strategy for ensuring sustainable water security both for the State and more particularly for this region. The joint studies carried out by the Central Ground Water Board and the Union Ministry of Water Resources and the State Government of Maharashtra indicate that 9 blocks out of 353 in Maharashtra fall under the "over-exploited" category; 1 in "critical category" and 19 in "Semi-critical category". The remaining 324 blocks fall in "safe" category. Besides, the ground water monitoring carried out by the CGWB in Maharashtra has revealed that the water level in a major part of the State ranged between 5 to 20 mbgl (metre below ground level) during the pre-monsoon period of 2012

In the blocks falling under the safe category, we should develop **Ground Water Sanctuaries** which could be tapped for domestic use as well as for the needs of farm animals, when absolutely essential. The Government of Maharashtra has already enacted the Maharashtra Ground

Water Regulation for Drinking Water purposes Act in 1993. A more comprehensive draft Ground Water Bill is also being developed. What is now important is to make rain water harvesting mandatory both in farms and in homes. At the same time, a more income and crop per drop of water movement should be promoted by all Gram Sabhas and local bodies. Supply augmentation and demand management should receive concurrent attention.

2013 represents the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the great Bengal famine when over 3 million children, women and men died out of hunger. It is therefore a matter for national pride that after 70 years our Government has introduced a bill in Parliament which will confer a legal right to food to over two thirds of our population. The transition from a “ship to mouth” existence to “right to food” with home grown food is the outcome of synergy among scientific skill, political will and farmer’s toil. We should salute our farm women and men for their contributions to national food security under extraordinarily difficult circumstances. An important feature of the food Security Bill is the provision for including in the Public Distribution system 'Climate Smart Nutri Millets' like *bajra*, *ragi* and minor millets. These grains should not be referred to as coarse cereals, since they are both nutrition rich and climate resilient.

2013 also represents the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the discovery by Watson and Crick the double helix structure of the DNA molecule. It is therefore appropriate that the University is sponsoring the 3<sup>rd</sup> Biotech Congress during its silver jubilee year. Public apprehensions about biosafety and environmental safety with reference to genetically modified crop varieties are widespread. Therefore, the University should initiate an effective genetic literacy movement bringing out clearly the risks and benefits associated with the new genetic technologies. At the same time, our country should lose no further time in developing a Regulatory System in the field of biosafety and biotechnology, which inspires public, professional, political and media confidence.

I hope the outgoing alumni of this University will help our rural families to harness the best in frontier technologies and suitably integrate them with traditional wisdom and ecological prudence. I congratulate the outgoing alumni and their parents and I once again thank the University for enrolling me as an Honorary Alumnus.

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