

THE SIXTH  
**CONVOCATION**

**28th February, 2018**

**Convocation Address**

**Pandit Bhajan Sopori**

**Sopori Academy of Music & Performing Arts  
New Delhi**



**UTKAL UNIVERSITY OF CULTURE  
BHUBANESWAR**



ADDRESS OF  
**PANDIT BHAJAN SOPORI**  
SOPORI ACADEMY OF MUSIC & PERFORMING ART  
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Revered and Hon'ble Governor & Chancellor Dr. S. C. Jamir Sahib, Revered Vice Chancellor Prof. Kamal Kant Misra Sahib, respected professors, management, staff, students and research scholars. It is an honour and a privilege for me to address this august gathering today on this day of the 6<sup>th</sup> Convocation of the Utkal University of Culture. At the onset I congratulate all the scholars who have been awarded the PhD in their respective fields this year. I'm sure my presence here today may be creating some curiosity to know about the journey of my life vis-à-vis music. Major part of my life has been into music and literature. I inherited music as a family heritage and then literature became a part of my life as a composer studying large number of classic and contemporary works of hundreds of writers across the world, scripts of films, radio plays, ballets, operas, etc. for musical scores. This actually helped in shaping my personality as a musician to understand the deep socio-cultural impact of music on the minds of individuals or masses.

I would like to share with you some of my early memories and experiences, which have contributed a lot to this journey. As human beings, we assess the world around us from time to time at every moment of our life and have a feel of positive and negative experiences. As human nature is, we appreciate, enjoy, and retain the positivity of our experiences, normally disdain and neglect negativity and make efforts to ignore the same. Probably, many a times what we find negative and disturbing actually begets or turns into something, which becomes a very strong driving factor in our life and chisels our personality to a level where one can handle the worst felt circumstances calmly.

My father Pandit Shamboo Nath Sopori, the great Master musician of the 300 year old legacy hailed as the 'Father of Music' in J&K, had to migrate with the entire family from Sopore, a small town in Kashmir, to Srinagar city in 1947 due to the political disturbance and turmoil in the Valley. Our ancestral house got burnt in a wide spread fire by the Kabali invaders destroying everything including our age-old precious manuscripts, musical instruments and other literary works. But my father's positive approach to life and his will to contribute to the nation made him to restart his life and bring music to the lives of people as a therapeutic element. He introduced music in a Government High School and Indian classical music was born for the masses in Jammu & Kashmir State. Establishing music from school to college level was also a hard struggle for him but his strong willpower and dedication broke all religious and social taboos revolving around music and dance and bought him the recognition of the 'Father of Music' in the State of J&K. While watching his incredible strength and his strong passion, I realized that I had a bigger responsibility to carry, which was much larger than any other factor. This led to the Cultural Revolution in the State of J&K through my hands and I used my Santoor and my compositions to highlight the concept of oneness and foster unity enshrining the idea of national integration, humanism and peace amongst the common man and the youth in particular.

Having been brought up in the company and patronage of saints of Shaivism and Sufi traditions, I became sensitive to various philosophical interpretations of life. Rigorous hard work, riyaz and powerful training by my gurus, my grandfather and father, gave me strength and motivation to pursue my aim and also developed a strong passion for more and more knowledge. There is

no end or limit to knowledge, and hence this pursuit is still on. I would like to quote a mantra usually chanted by us from Brhadaranyaka Upanishad, which says "Tamaso Ma Jyotir Gamaya" meaning "From darkness, lead me to light". But, do mere prayers bear fruits without proper efforts? The answer is - Not at all. The Action cannot be replaced with anything else but the action of doing the exercise itself, which is systematic and rigorous training or practice or sadhna. I have followed a simple rule all my life which my grandfather Pt. Samsar Chand Sopori, another great Master musician from J&K State, taught me, that is 'Karam Prabal hai' (Karma or the Action is the strongest virtue of life). And my life is reflected in a quote of AllamaIqbal where he said "Khudi Ko Kar Buland Itna Ke Har Taqder Se Pehle Khuda Bande Se Pooche Bata Teri Raza Kya Hai".

I started performing as a child prodigy in the year 1953 in a music concert, which led to the revelation of Santoor for the first time in the history of Indian Classical music. The concert was subsequently followed by various programmes organized by Radio Kashmir Srinagar, Cultural Department of J&K State and various Government and private organizations in and outside the State as well. In 1959 at Allahabad conference, a place of strong cultural base and Centre of classical music concerts and seminars, people outside the Valley, for the first time ever, came to know about Classical Santoor as a musical instrument of Kashmir. As I grew up, I introduced Santoor to the students at school, college and university levels. In the mean time I was associated with a couple of schools also as a part time choral music composer and conductor, and that set my base into the world of compositions, which gradually grew up with me. After I returned from USA in 1973, where I studied

Western classical compositions to gain a systematic base for my compositional works and its analysis, I joined Radio Srinagar Kashmir as the youngest producer of music. I started with a big bang modernization of Kashmiri light music, which I felt was important for the people of my State. Though people actually liked and enjoyed it but they had some reservations, which brought me criticism rather than appreciation. I was regularly featured in various columns of print media with articles against me quoting that my experimentation and innovations was destroying the Kashmiriyat. Some people even perceived my work as an act of cultural invasion of Indian & Western musical thought. This can surly disappoint anyone to the extent of withdrawing the started act. But my hope and confidence became stronger thanks to a small but effective percentage of the youth who showed their appreciation for my creative productions. But I did not neglect the opinion of my non-supporters. This pursuit, however, set the base for my analysis and understanding of the strength or the loopholes, administrative powers or the weaknesses, and various other factors of broadcasting system, which has been the greatest medium of communication. It developed in me a sensitive broadcaster who could feel the emotions and heartbeats of people listening to my music. It developed my understanding of how music connects to the minds of people and survives in their hearts and helps to modernize their thoughts; what should be the text of a song that enthralls people maintaining their religious or social sentiments; what should be the melodic frames especially when you are operating in a particular region, etc. This, with God's grace, proved a blessing and the people of my State gradually understood me and got connected to me through my music and I could revolutionize the entire Kashmiri musical genre what is

known as the “Renaissance of music in the J&K State”. My efforts of bringing age-old forgotten melodies to the public and introducing variety of Sufi content and Vedanta Shastra with different yet heart touching melodies was highly appreciated by all. This process initiated the plinth of the regional music industry in the State.

In this process I composed more than 4000 songs for Kashmir, which set a concrete base for orchestration and introduction of new talented singers bringing them to the national and international platform. My Santoor has been my tool to enter the hearts of people and I introduced all varieties of the Gayaki Ang (vocal system) like Dhrupad, Khayal, Tarana, Tappa, and Bandish and various variation of the Tantrakari Ang (instrumental system) like use of Pakhawaj, Gattam, Kanjira, Mrigangam, etc. and many other regional and folk rhythmic and percussion instruments.

The foremost intention of my life has been to bring music to the masses, as I believe that music can survive if it is made popular in the general public. Creativity can only flourish when the boundaries of experimentation are limitless. But one needs to understand the spirit of creativity and relevance of experimentation. Innovations are constructive only when it contributes to the lives of people in a positive direction and doesn't destroy the traditions or beliefs of people. Any kind of musical production and experimentation also has to be put in such an order where it can be easily understood and appreciated by all thereby creating harmony in the lives of the listeners. This is possible only if the musician or the composer is well versed with the entire musical styles and also aware of the socio-cultural-religious history of

the region. One should also know various folk, tribal and classical systems to carry out effective experiments and innovations.

We have to contribute to our society, country and the entire planet with our creative works which makes a difference in the lives of the people and for that one has to take strong initiatives for which we need strength through pillars like rigorous training, dedication and devotion, and clear vision and ideology with a positive approach. One should never feel disheartened due to criticism, as it's a factor that can actually help in the analysis and improvement of creative work thereby making it a path breaking work or innovation.

I conclude my speech with a hope that all the students excel in their respective fields and achieve success with new creative works and experimentations bring smile on the faces of everyone around the world.

Jai Hind!



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