

9th Foundation Day Lecture

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Honorable Vice-Chancellor of St. Xavier's University, Kolkata, esteemed dignitaries, respected faculty members and staffs, dear students, parents, valued alumni, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an immense honor to stand before you today on the occasion of the 9th foundation day of St. Xavier's University, Kolkata. This day marks nearly a decade of excellence and relentless pursuit of knowledge, echoing the rich Jesuit tradition of education that has shaped countless minds across the globe. Founded by the Jesuits in 1860, St. Xavier's College, Kolkata, has played a pivotal role in education and culture in Bengal. In 2006, it became the first autonomous college in West Bengal while maintaining its affiliation with the University of Calcutta and expanded its academic reach by establishing St. Xavier's University, Kolkata in 2017.

Throughout its history, the institution has produced numerous notable academics and alumni who have significantly contributed to society, upholding the college's esteemed reputation. As we celebrate nearly a decade of St. Xavier's University, we reflect on the enduring legacy and impact of the institution, and we look forward to continuing this tradition of excellence for many more years to come.

As we commemorate the achievements of this institution, let us also reflect on the transformative journey of education in West Bengal, driven by the unwavering commitment of the Department of Higher Education and the collaborative efforts of educators, students, and policymakers.

Education in Bengal: A Transformative Journey

West Bengal has long been a leader in educational innovation and reform, building on its rich history of establishing some of India's earliest universities. This legacy has been advanced through recent substantial transformations in both higher and school education, marked by increased budgetary allocations, infrastructure development, and a focus on holistic student development. The emphasis is on nurturing well-rounded individuals, ensuring that education transcends mere academic achievement. The State Education Policy (SEP) initiated on 05.09.2023 is closely aligned with Bengal's transformative education goals, aiming to create a robust, inclusive, and future-ready education system. The policy has been designed to cater to the diverse needs of students and foster both regional and national development.

Higher Education: A Catalyst for Change

The landscape of higher education in West Bengal has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past decade. This metamorphosis is driven by strategic investments and a commitment to expanding access and inclusivity.

- **Increased Budget:** Higher education funding surged from Rs. 1,724 crores in 2010-11 to Rs. 6,404.24 crores by 2024-25.
- **University Expansion:** Universities grew from 12 to 42, with 11 private universities.
- **HEI Doubling:** Higher Education Institutions nearly doubled from 1,056 to 2,049.
- **Enrolment and Gender Parity:** Gross Enrolment rose from 13.24 to 27.22 lakhs; gender parity improved from 42% to 49.50%.

School Education: Building the Foundations for Education

The advancements in school education have been equally noteworthy, with targeted investments and initiatives transforming the educational landscape.

- **Budgetary Growth:** The education budget rose from 829 Cr INR in 2010-11 to 10,260 Cr INR in 2024-25, with significant investments in schools and future projects.
- **Expansion of Elementary Schools:** Since 2011, 7,259 new elementary schools have been added, reaching 57,619 by 2024, with over 218,000 new classrooms.
- **Integration of Technology:** Smart classrooms have been implemented in 2,650 schools through the KYAN initiative, and most secondary schools now have computers.
- **Gross Enrollment and Gender Parity:** Gross enrolment at secondary and higher secondary levels has increased, with the gender parity index rising from 0.87 to 1.31 between 2011-12 and 2023-24.
- **Mid-Day Meal Scheme and Dropout Rates:** The Mid-Day Meal scheme supports 11.3 million students, achieving 0% dropout rates at primary levels and reducing secondary dropout rates significantly.

Departmental Initiatives and Achievements:

The Department of Education has been instrumental in driving these changes, with a clear focus on integrating technology into education.

- The successful implementation of computer facilities in 93.66% of secondary schools and 97.94% of higher secondary schools is a testament to these efforts. This technological integration is not just about providing access to computers; it is about transforming the learning experience, fostering digital literacy, and preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st Century.
- The introduction of vocational training from Class 6 is a groundbreaking initiative designed to impart practical skills alongside academic learning, preparing students for the global economy by aligning education with industry needs. This approach enhances employability and empowers students to become job creators.
- Complementing this, the Sabooj Sathi initiative has provided 12.7 million students with free bicycles, removing transportation barriers and promoting school accessibility and retention, thus reducing dropout rates.

- Additionally, scholarship schemes like the Swami Vivekananda Merit Cum Means Scholarship and Taruner Swapno Scheme have made education financially accessible to millions, serving as a lifeline for students and enabling them to pursue their aspirations. The Kanyashree Prakalpa has positively impacted young women by offering financial independence and educational opportunities, earning international acclaim, including the United Nations Public Service Award in 2017. Together, these initiatives foster a culture of learning and empowerment, ensuring that students are well-equipped to contribute to society.

Integrating Discipline and Performing Arts

Beyond academics, the holistic development of students is a fundamental goal of our educational strategy. As emphasized in recent Bengal Global Business Summit 2025, integrating discipline and Performing Arts into education is vital for nurturing well-rounded individuals. Performing Arts, in particular, play a crucial role in mental health, cognitive development, and emotional well-being. They foster creativity, enhance communication skills, and provide an outlet for self-expression, all of which are essential for personal growth.

Policies that incorporate Performing Arts into the curriculum support students facing academic challenges and promote resilience and adaptability. By encouraging participation in the arts, we are providing students with the tools they need to navigate the complexities of life and emerge as confident, empathetic, and socially responsible individuals.

Our Vision for Tomorrow

West Bengal envisions establishing itself as a global educational hub by enhancing research, fostering collaborative skills, and adopting dynamic teaching methods.

The state is strategically collaborating with leading consulting firms and knowledge partners to become a prominent economic and technological hub in India. By actively exploring Public-Private Partnership (PPP) models, West Bengal aims to enhance its infrastructure and services, aligning with its broader vision of economic and technological leadership. These partnerships enable the state to leverage expert insights and detailed reports, which refine strategies for the successful implementation of various projects.

This approach is anticipated to attract necessary expertise and investment, facilitating sustainable growth and development across multiple sectors and solidifying West Bengal's position as a major economic and IT hub. To achieve this vision, strategic partnerships between industry and academia are crucial, bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application and ensuring graduates are equipped with the skills needed to excel in a rapidly evolving job market. Prioritizing innovation, entrepreneurship, and research in the educational agenda is essential to driving economic growth and social development.

Today, as we celebrate nearly a decade of academic and institutional growth at St. Xavier's University, Kolkata, we recognize the profound impact this institution has had in shaping the educational landscape. The advancements we celebrate today are testaments to our collective efforts and a beacon of hope for future generations. St. Xavier's University, Kolkata with its rich Jesuit heritage and commitment to excellence, continues to inspire and lead in this transformative journey of education, nurturing minds and shaping the leaders of tomorrow.

As we look to the future, let us reaffirm our commitment to creating an inclusive, equitable, and dynamic educational environment that empowers every student to reach their full potential. Together, let us build a brighter future for West Bengal, where education is a catalyst for change, innovation, and progress.

Thank you.