

December 16, 2011

Press Release: Prof. Amartya Sen conferred with ‘Doctor of Letters’ at Jamia

Jamia Millia Islamia held a ‘**Special Convocation**’ on **December 16, 2011 at 3 PM** in Dr. M.A. Ansari Auditorium, Jamia Millia Islamia to confer the degree of ‘**Doctor of Letters**’ (*Honoris Causa*) on **Prof. Amartya Sen**.

Mr. Najeeb Jung, Vice-Chancellor, Jamia Millia Islamia presided over the ‘**Special Convocation**’.

The **Citation** presented to him on the occasion reads, “In honouring Professor Amartya Sen with the degree of **Doctor of Letters** (*Honoris Causa*), the Jamia Millia Islamia, an institution established to encourage innovative thought and champion the cause of India’s Freedom, acknowledges his seminal contribution to the domain of knowledge, scholarship and critical thought.’ (**The full text of the citation is enclosed for your perusal**)

Mr. Najeeb Jung, Vice Chancellor, Jamia Millia Islamia on the occasion highlighted “**the importance of being Amartya Sen in these polarized times**” and added that “**the lesson of his remarkable life for all us in the university is fourfold**. 1) That subject categories are meant to be enabling, not stifling...2) That the life of the mind is most meaningful when it harnesses curiosity to the cause of humanity...3) That good policy has to be derived from clear first principles: the intellectual life isn’t peripheral to governance, it is central to it. 4) That there is no contradiction between being a grounded Indian and a citizen of the world. **Professor Sen has been Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, President of the American Economic Association, Professor at Harvard without once ceasing to be an engaged Indian**. This has to do with more than the colour of his passport. It is connected to his attachment to Bengal, his socialization is Santiniketan, his immersion in the history of the sub-continent, and above all, his conviction that cosmopolitanism and Indianness are functions of one’s values, not one’s location.” (**The full text of the Vice Chancellor’s address is attached for your perusal**)

After receiving the degree of ‘Doctor of Letters’, **Prof Amartya Sen said** that that he is proud to become associated with Jamia Millia Islamia which is an admixture of South Asian Muslim History, National Heritage, and a Global Academic Institution.

While posing the question that, ‘**does higher education make a huge difference?**’, **Prof Amartya Sen** cited the names of the likes of Mahatama Gandhi, Karl Marx, Nelson Mandela, Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad among others to highlight the importance of higher education in providing the foundation for their success in their respective field of operation.

Prof Sen further added that the highest contribution of any higher education is “**the cultivation of questioning and doubt**”. Quoting Francis Bacon, he said that there is an inviolable connection between knowledge and doubt.

Prof. Amartya Sen is a world renowned Economist who was awarded the **1998 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences** for his contributions to ‘welfare economics’ and ‘social choice theory’ and for bringing into focus the problems of the poorest members of society. He was awarded the ‘**Bharat Ratna**’, the highest civilian award in India, in **1999**.

Prof Sen is currently the **Thomas W. Lamont University Professor and Professor of Economics and Philosophy at Harvard University**.

The convocation was attended by the university community – students, teachers and staff as also by invited dignitaries from the government, embassies, other academic institutions and members of the press.

Please find attached a few pictures of the special convocation for your use.

(Media Coordinator)
Jamia Millia Islamia

The Vice-Chancellor's Convocation Speech

Professor Amartya Sen, ladies and gentlemen,

This special convocation comes at a time when the world faces an economic downturn graver than any since the Great Depression. The settled economic wisdom of half a century has been challenged by the near-collapse of the market economies and financial systems of the West. These, not so long ago, were billed as the great engines that would integrate the economies of the world into one global system.

We meet at a time when the choices that countries and, within countries, universities, face, are made starker by this sense of crisis. These aren't abstract, academic choices: they are debated in our newspapers and our broadcast media every day.

Do we want India to be an integral part of a global economy or do we want to insulate ourselves (always presuming we can) from the volatility of the world's markets?

If this seems like a question remote from the concerns of the university, let me stress its immediate relevance. As we prepare to train young Indians to make their way in a grim global economy, should we prioritize professional disciplines like engineering and the hard sciences or continue to support liberal arts subjects which don't always excite corporate campus recruiters?

Can the Indian university afford to invest in knowledge for its own sake? Or to put it another way, can it afford not to without negating the very principle of intellectual inquiry?

Old arguments take on a new edge in times of trouble. Should poor countries like India concentrate on creating efficient, meritocratic institutions or on redressing historical inequality through affirmative action? Should the principle of reservation in universities, for example,

be extended to cover more deprived communities or gradually phased out in the name of merit?

At the national level we are confronted by the same binary choices: should we, for example, prioritize economic growth over distributive justice?

In the matter of politics and culture should we seek an authentic Indian-ness or embrace a secular cosmopolitanism?

Is there an Asian route to modernity that China has pioneered and which India should emulate or is social democracy combined with a market economy still the best way forward?

Many of us have felt oppressed by the bullying, black-and-white rhetoric of these choices which simplify the complex reality of the world into ideological sloganeering.

The rhetoric that has given us the metaphorical opposition between Left and Right, Indigenous and Cosmopolitan, Traditional and Modern, the West and the Rest, is plainly inadequate as a way of dealing with a world that no longer fits the categories of the Cold War.

The challenge is to find new ways of thinking about this world that can replace the ideological reflexes of another time.

And this is why we are so privileged to have with us someone who is not just one of the great minds of modern times, but who, in his life and his work, embodies the rejection of the black-and-white choice, the tyranny of the Either/Or, Professor Amartya Kumar Sen.

Professor Sen is a man of such impossible distinction that I shan't waste your time in trying to precise his achievements in a short speech. Suffice it to say that had he not won the Nobel Prize for economics or the Bharat

Ratna, he would still have been one of the most honoured men on this planet. What I do want to emphasize is the importance of being Amartya Sen in these polarised times.

In his life and his work, Professor Sen has defied categorization.

For example, in an age when economists seem to write a prose based more on numbers than letters, Professor Sen is one of the great essayists of our times.

In a period of ever greater specialisation, he holds a double chair at Harvard, he is the Lamont Professor of both Economics and Philosophy.

At a time when economists write a historical theorems about trade and institutions, Professor Sen's work, on famine to take only one example, is densely historical.

What's more, he has been perfectly happy to make forays out of the so-called mainstream of the dismal science, into the unfashionable terrain, for example, of development economics.

He is that rare public intellectual who publishes both in the Wall Street Journal and the Economic and Political Weekly.

The lesson of his remarkable life for all of us in the university is fourfold:

1. That subject categories are meant to be enabling, not stifling. They are disciplinary platforms for an exploration of the whole world.

2. That the life of the mind is most meaningful when it harnesses curiosity to the cause of humanity. The UNDP Human Development Index which Dr Sen was crucially involved in formulating has given the policy maker and the intelligent lay person, a way of measuring and understanding social progress.

3. That good policy has to be derived from clear first principles: the intellectual life isn't peripheral to governance, it is central to it.

4. That there is no contradiction between being a grounded Indian and a citizen of the world. Professor Sen has been Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, President of the American Economic Association, Professor at Harvard without once ceasing to be an engaged Indian. This has to do with more than the colour of his passport. It is connected to his attachment to Bengal, his socialization in Santiniketan, his immersion in the history of the sub-continent, and above all, his conviction that cosmopolitanism and Indianness are functions of one's values, not one's location.

While Prof Sen would be an inspiration to any academic audience, I like to think that his presence in Jamia Millia Islamia is particularly appropriate. From the time of its formation in the crucible of the Non-Cooperation Movement, Jamia has been committed to the idea of the engaged academic life. Dr Zakir Hussain, Vice-Chancellor of Jamia well before he became the President of our republic, would have recognized in Prof. Sen a kindred spirit who saw the university not as an ivory tower, but as an agent of change.

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming the master of much more than an old Cambridge college, Professor Amartya Kumar Sen.



JAMIA MILLIA ISLAMIA
NEW DELHI
(A Central University Established by an Act of the Parliament of India)

SPECIAL CONVOCATION
TO CONFER THE DEGREE

OF

DOCTOR OF LETTERS
(*HONORIS CAUSA*)

ON

PROFESSOR AMARTYA SEN

Friday, 16 December 2011

CITATION

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Professor Amartya Sen's exposure to socially divisive identities, communal violence and economic un-freedom in the formative years of his life led him to assume a critical role for himself in reorienting approach to development. Rooted in an intellectual tradition that fostered cultural diversity and universal tolerance, he took upon himself the task of reconstructing the notion of 'development as freedom'. He essayed to put development in a new paradigm, taking it beyond conventional frontiers. He characterized development 'as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy'. While recognizing that the growth of gross national product or of individual incomes could be important 'as means to expanding the freedoms enjoyed by the members of the society', he expounded that, in conjunction with political and civil rights, freedoms were contingent on other determinants, such as social and economic arrangements, for example social and health care facilities.

Born at Santiniketan, India, on November 3, 1933, Professor Amartya Sen was educated at the Presidency College, Kolkata and Trinity College, Cambridge. At present he is Thomas W. Lamont University Professor and Professor of Economics and Philosophy, Harvard University. He is the recipient of the 1998 Nobel Prize in Economic Science. Professor Sen was the Master of Trinity College from 1998 to 2004. He has served as Professor of Economics at Harvard University, Oxford University, London School of Economics, and Delhi School of Economics. He is also a Fellow of the Trinity College, Cambridge and Distinguished Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford. Having begun his professional career as a Professor of Economics at Jadavpur University in 1956, he went on to serve as the President of the Indian Economics Association, the American Economic Association, the International Economic Association and the Econometric Society.

Professor Sen's engagements with foundational issues related to welfare economics, social choice theory, inequalities and poverty, on the one hand, and rational, tolerant and democratic social choice, on the other, enabled him to argue for inclusive development with systematic political broadening and social enlargement. His deep appreciation of mathematical logic and epistemology only furthered his study of social decisions, along with investigating inequality and deprivation. The differential complexity of human preferences allowed him to explore the feasibility of reasonable social choice. What developed into a theoretical postulation, directed a variety

of economic and social appraisals such as measuring economic equality, judging poverty and deprivation, analyzing unemployment, investigating the principles and implications of liberty and rights, assessing gender inequality and so on. Reorienting his research, he used a broadened framework of social choice theory in a variety of applied problems, thus conflating theory with praxis.

Prof. Sen is credited with developing a broader informational approach to the assessment of development for the United Nations Development Programme. His work in the domain of development economics has made governments, in different capitals of the world, view health and education in a new perspective. In his recent lectures and writings, Professor Sen has underscored the importance of education that encourages critical thinking and reasoning, the ability to debate, public reasoning and the inclusion of traditionally excluded voices.

In honouring Professor Amartya Sen with the Degree of Doctor of Letters (*Honoris Causa*), the Jamia Millia Islamia, an institution established to encourage innovative thought and champion the cause of India's Freedom, acknowledges his seminal contribution to the domain of knowledge, scholarship and critical thought.

I, therefore, pray Mr. Vice Chancellor, that you may most graciously confer on Professor Amartya Sen, the Degree of Doctor of Letters (*Honoris Causa*).

16th December, 2011



