

**Fr Arturo Sosa, S.J.**  
**Loyola College**  
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**“The Jesuit Higher Education in India: Equity, Excellence and Sustainability”**

It is a great pleasure and a privilege for me to be with you on this historic occasion of the celebration of the Centenary year of Loyola College, Chennai, marking it with an international conference on **“The Jesuit Higher Education in India: Equity, Excellence and Sustainability.”**

**Heirs to a dense history**

I would like to begin my sharing on a historical note. Jesuit Higher Education in India began in Goa in 1543, with the establishment of St Paul’s College, the first Jesuit College in the world, by St. Francis Xavier, one of the founding fathers of the Society of Jesus. Later in 1844, St. Joseph’s College, was established at Nagapattinam by the New Madurai Mission and shifted to Tiruchirapalli.

Loyola College, Chennai was established in 1925 and this year we are celebrating its Centenary. Presently, India has 78 Jesuit Higher Educational Institutions which cater to the students belonging to different religions, languages and socio-economic groups. I thank God for His wonderful providence and presence in guiding these institutions through which the student community has been empowered, thanks to the mediation of collaborators and Jesuits, for building the Indian nation through Higher Education.

**Equity**

The 32<sup>nd</sup> General Congregation of the Society of Jesus in 1975, set in motion the wind of change by highlighting the fact that the service of faith, The *raison d’être* of the Society of Jesus, demanded the promotion of Justice and should be an integral part of the apostolic works of the Society of Jesus. The Higher Education apostolate was to be no exception to this.

I greatly appreciate the Jesuits of the then Indian Assistancy for plunging into action immediately by reworking the admission policy in the Higher Educational Institutions. They saw how the poor and the marginalized fared in our institutions vis-a-vis the rich, and how the prevailing fee structures both in the colleges and hostels impacted them

negatively. They had the courage to take bold steps to reorient the campus culture in favour of the poor, and to make the poor “the context” of our education.

Besides, I am fully convinced that the Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus, which run from 2019 to 2029, have brought about a renewal in the Higher Educational Institutions, and given a fresh impetus to our way of proceeding in South Asia.

### **Excellence**

Secondly, I am aware that the Jesuit Higher Educational Institutions in India never compromise on the quality of education they offer to the nation. We run 5 universities, 12 autonomous colleges, 25 affiliated colleges, 10 business schools, 10 colleges of education, 4 engineering colleges, 1 law college, and 11 national centres. I am happy to say that these centres of Jesuit Higher Education in India have set “excellence” as their benchmark. Apart from these Higher Educational Institutions, there are 8 distinct Research Centres with varying intent, spread over the country. Also, the output of these Institutes of Excellence can be seen from the presence of numerous alumni/ae in institutions and companies, both in the public and private sectors, who are highly placed in decision-making processes in countries, spread around the globe.

Many alumni of ours are found in well-acclaimed positions such as honest political leaders, in Research and Development of different renowned companies, as social activists, environmental advocates and leaders in the Health industry.

I am also happy to inform you that St Xavier’s, Kolkata, ranked 6<sup>th</sup> and Loyola, Chennai, ranked 8<sup>th</sup> in 2024, by the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) of the Ministry of Education, Government of India, have always secured places among the top 10 colleges of 43,796 colleges in India. There are another 16 Jesuit Colleges within the top 100 in India. I am also pleased to hear that management institutes like Xavier Labour Relations Institute in Jamshedpur and Loyola Institute of Business Administration in Chennai, are forging ahead for worldwide ranking through the Association to Advance Collegiate School of Business (AACSB), a global accredited body.

From our Jesuit identity and charism we do not refer to any kind of excellence, a word that can be understood in a “mundane” horizon that ensures positions of honor or power. We are referring to the excellence that arises from the knowledge of the person of Jesus through which the model of the human being created by God is revealed. It is the excellence of those who develop the personal potentialities that they have received as a

gift to qualify their service to others and to dedicate their lives to the transformation of social structures that prevent justice and opportunities for a dignified life for all human beings.

### **Sustainability**

Apart from the areas of *social equity and human excellence*, I am consoled that the Higher Educational Institutions in India are also systematically moving towards Sustainable Developmental Studies to impart knowledge, skills and values combined with the ability to tackle issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss, overuse of resources and inequality that impact the well-being of people and the planet.

These Sustainable Developmental Studies have taken various forms in different institutions. I understand that there are specific research institutes, post-graduate courses and under-graduate courses offered in this line within the campus of each institution. Along with the above-mentioned courses, Green Audit, Environment Audit, Energy Audit, Hygiene, Waste Management, Air, Soil and Water Quality Tests are also being conducted to promote an eco-friendly and hygienic atmosphere. These form an integral part of the sustainable development programme in each institution.

Such a kind of ambience within a campus would surely inculcate a lot of awareness and a sense of responsibility in the students, to take care of the planet Earth, which is our Common Home, and the well-being of their neighbours.

### **Formed with intellectual depth for the transformation of human life**

Higher Education in India should not only be higher in terms of academics, but also delve deeper and aim at the holistic development of the students, to become men and women for and with others; students who are imbued with a commitment to promote moral values, social justice and sustainable development. Producing students who are counter-cultural, who are committed to promote a more just, humane and reconciled world, and who are imbued with the 4 Cs of Jesuit education: Conscience, Competence, Compassion and Commitment are the real goals of Jesuit education.

I would like to remind all of you here present, that the Jesuit General Congregation 34, D 16, n. 394 strongly affirmed “the distinctive importance of the intellectual quality of each of our apostolic works”. This would apply in no small measure to our institutions of Higher Education.

The intellectual dimension is fundamental to our existence, especially in Higher Educational Institutions, as changes happen around us rapidly and radically. In this context, the GC 34, D 16, n. 396 also very aptly stated that intellectual work is painstaking, and quite frequently, solitary work.

Finally, to emphasize and reiterate the contribution of GC 34, I say that any Higher Education Institution including a Jesuit University or College has to immerse itself in the mission of promoting human, social, spiritual and moral formation. I assure you of my sincere prayers in all your endeavours, and I wish you all the best for an equitable, excellent and sustainable future.

May these first hundred years of Loyola College Chennai be a source of inspiration for the present and an impetus to renew the commitment to form men and women committed to putting their lives at the service of a world in which everyone finds the conditions and opportunities for a humanly dignified life.

Congratulations!

Thank you so much.