

Dear students, faculty, alumni, parents and founders,

I write to you today as your professor, Founding Vice-Chancellor and Chancellor, and as also a key architect of Ashoka University.

I have been associated with Ashoka University for nearly ten years from the time I was invited to teach on its Young India Fellowship program in 2011. In 2014, I was privileged to be appointed the University's Founding Vice-Chancellor and its first Professor of History.

I was involved, with several colleagues, in designing Ashoka's initial academic offering, its first set of Foundation Courses, and hiring the first members of the faculty. This past decade of building Ashoka University has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.

Ashoka University's commitment to core values and our Founders and Trustees' role are being questioned in the wake of the recent resignation of Professor Pratap Bhanu Mehta. I want to respond to this. First, Pratap is a close personal friend and someone who I immensely respect. I was involved in bringing him to Ashoka, and he succeeded me as Vice-Chancellor. He has made invaluable contributions to building Ashoka into the institution it is today. We all regret what has happened, but I am sure we will recover and move forward from the situation we find ourselves in.

It would be no exaggeration to say that some of my colleagues, including faculty members and some Founders, and myself drew up the core values of Ashoka—critical thinking, intellectual autonomy, learning through debate and interaction, the importance of social responsibility, and of moral courage. Ashoka University and its reputation stand on these pillars. We have always been and will remain committed to academic freedom and intellectual independence. This is why Ashoka has set new standards in higher education in India. With our additional commitment to excellence, I do not doubt that we will continue to scale new heights.

While its bold vision and achievements are a source of deep fulfillment, I have derived tremendous inspiration working with the Founders of Ashoka. I had to engage very closely with the Founders in building and fundraising for the University. I can only say these are individuals who have worked selflessly and tirelessly to build Ashoka into what it is today. Most of us were introduced to Ashoka by them. They have worked alongside us and seamlessly with us. Ashoka has a unique and unprecedented governance model that is collaborative but has natural guardrails to preserve academic integrity and independence.

Today when the Founders are being attacked for trying to compromise and curtail academic autonomy and freedom of expression, I find it necessary as Chancellor, and given my association with Ashoka from its inception, to state unambiguously that the Founders have never interfered with academic freedom: faculty members have been left free to construct their own courses, follow their own methods of teaching and their own methods of assessment. They have also been left free to carry out their own research and publications.

There are only two points that the Founders have insisted upon. One, that Ashoka should not compromise on intellectual standards; and two, that the Foundation Courses should be integral to Ashoka's academic offering.

Ashoka has been, for me, a place of many firsts and of setting new benchmarks. As the Chancellor, I see it as my duty that the core values as laid out above are unfailingly adhered to. As Ashoka University overcomes these difficult times and moves forward.

I hope you will stay unwavering in your support for our quest to build India's greatest university.



Rudrangshu Mukherjee
Chancellor
Ashoka University

20th March, 2021