

Acceptance and Key Note Speech by Anant Singh

Chancellor Vuka Tshabalala, Chair of the Council Dr Jairam Reddy, Council Members of DUT, Vice Chancellors, Principals and Deans of the various facilities, Academic and support staff, distinguished guests, parents, well wishes and fellow graduates, it gives me great pleasure to stand before you to be the recipient of an Honorary Doctorate from this institution. Thank you for this huge honour which I greatly appreciate. It is especially significant for me as a citizen of Durban. I am proud to join an exceptional group of previous recipients, many of whom are friends including Wendy Luhabe, Ela Ghandi, Prof Ndebele, Ronnie Govender, Nanda Soobben and Andrew Verster.

Despite the inequalities of my life growing up in a segregated society, we have always loved this city and its people. My entire life has been spent within a few kilometre radius of where we stand right now.

My primary school education was at Springfield Hindu School and thereafter at Springfield Flats and my high school was completed at Sastri College a few minutes walk from here.

My father had an 8mm film camera and the silent films of Charlie Chaplin and others captivated me. Being interested in the moving image and creative industries at Sastri College, I ran the film programme at the school. I also had extra circular studies in drama at the ML Sultan College which was the institution which merged with the various other Durban Colleges to become the Durban University of Technology.

During those years, through high school, I used to work during holidays and weekends in a film rental store. In those days we had no television (which eventually arrived in 1976), so the entertainment of the day was hiring large 16mm projectors and film. I earned R1 a day doing this and it gave me the unique opportunity to begin to watch films and learn from that experience. I desperately wanted to study film, but the only film school in South Africa was in Pretoria and it was reserved for white people only.

Film school not being an option, I decided at my mother's insistence, to enrol at the University of Durban Westville and I made the choice of Engineering. My heart of course was still in film and I continued to work through holidays in the film store.

Into my second year of University, the owners of the store decided that it was too small for them and they wanted to get rid of it. I was 18 at the time, I had no money and it was a major decision that I took to try and see if I could figure a way to buy the store. I consulted with the

Dean of my Faculty, who advised that I had five more years to study and after five years, I possibly could get a job. In those days there were job reservations, which meant that preference was given to a white person with an equal qualification. Additionally, he said that if I got a job, I would be earning about R1500 a month.

So it was not a difficult decision. I took on the challenges of an entrepreneur and went into the film business at 18 and said to myself that if it did not work out, I could always go back to Engineering. Needless to say the issues of race was again a big factor as the shop that I had now entered into an agreement for, was in a “white area”, so I had to figure out ways to deal with that. Hard work and long hours followed.

I was happy, but my mother certainly wasn't. She thought it was an insane decision, as no one had ever heard of the business of film. She is in the audience today and of course she has changed her mind subsequently. I thank her for her love and support over the years.

Anyway, that was then.

South Africa today is a very changed country as we celebrate our 20 years of democracy. Our peaceful transition from an apartheid racist ridden country to a democracy is an inspiration to the world. It is one of the most remarkable transformations ever. We have had the very good fortune to have leaders like Walter Sisulu, Nelson Mandela, Ahmed Kathrada, Oliver Tambo, Joe Slovo and so many others to lead us to our freedom.

Many of you are 'Born Frees' and ask the question of why is our transformation taking so long to give us more meaningful opportunities. I fully agree that the pace of change has been slow, but it is you who can make a difference, as you are our future leaders. You have a vote, which I hope you have exercised in the last election and I hope that you will continue to do so in the provincial and all future elections. You are the master of your own destiny and that of the young people that are still not yet eligible to vote.

South Africa is a very special country, having travelled widely. It is one of the most beautiful and exceptional places on earth. We have great people, people that are caring and loving in most part, and despite the problems that we have, there is immense opportunity. There is so much work ahead and you, and together with your friends and colleagues, you need to engage in making it all better.

It is an honour for me to be a fellow graduate with the 294 members that are being honoured today, especially as you are our future.

I urge you to look to opportunities for yourself, even though the job market may not enable you to find you a job quickly, try and find opportunities that would allow you to use your talents and skills. Follow your instincts and your heart. There will be many challenges in your life, but as Madiba said, "it always seems impossible until it is done" – embrace that and make your own destiny.

When I made my first film, *A PLACE OF WEEPING*, in the mid 80's, it was done after Madiba and the ANC made the call to everyone to try and speak out against apartheid. Being a filmmaker, I decided that the best way for me to do this, was to make a film that would speak out against apartheid. The film was directed by a white person, Darrell Roodt and we shot the film in 10 days on the run from the dreaded apartheid security police. After a battle with the censorship authorities, we managed to get the film shown in South Africa, albeit in segregated cinemas. I could not see the film that I produced in a white cinema and went to watch it on the opening night in Soweto and thereafter, the director and I had dinner, as he had watched it in a white cinema. How far we have come in the past 28 years?

We need to commit ourselves to continuing the legacy of Madiba and Walter Sisulu and all our other leaders who have given their lives to our freedom. We need to commit ourselves to achieving and succeeding individually. We need to make South Africa the best place for all the people who live in it, a non- racist, non- sexist country, where all people are treated equally.

The opening lines to the constitution of the Republic of South Africa are:

We, the people of South Africa,

Recognise the injustices of our past.

Honour those who have suffered for justice and freedom in our land.

Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country and

Believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity.

Our rights are protected by that constitution and for the past 10 years I have had to go through a legal process through all the courts of the land ending up at the Constitutional Court, ultimately victorious with a unanimous judgement from the judges to be awarded the Natal Command site that we had purchased in 2003.

We are committed to continuing to develop and grow the film industry in our city and province, and to tell South African stories in our country. The Durban film city will be a special development which will not only benefit the film industry but also the people of Durban, the province and the country.

I humbly accept this honour, but the award not only comes to me. It is for the many thousands of people who come together to make every motion picture what it is. I accept it collectively, as I would not be up here with you, had it not been for all of them. It took me 25 years to get MANDELA: LONG WALK TO FREEDOM to the big screen. I began by writing to Madiba while he was still in prison and in 1996 he granted me the rights to his autobiography, Long Walk to Freedom. There were many challenges, the largest of which was getting this film made into a two and a half hour film, as I could have easily have made a 10 hour miniseries. With perseverance and goodwill, we were able to complete the film, of which we are very proud. I am equally delighted that it had the support of Madiba and also that he was able to see some of it prior to his passing.

I would like to make special mention of my family that are here with me today. My wife, Vanashree and my children Gyana and Kiyana who I hope are inspired by the 295 graduates that

will go through for their capping this morning. All of you are our future leaders and I am proud to be sharing this platform with you.

The entire team from Videovision Entertainment are also here to share this special morning with me. I would like to acknowledge them and thank them for their exceptional support over the years. Many of them have been a part of the company for over 30 years. I especially thank my brother Sanjeev Singh and partner Sudhir Pragjee.

Once again, thanks to all the executives, lecturers, professors that have committed themselves to education and the task of improving the lives of students at this University. You do amazing work and we are all greatly appreciative.

Thank you.