

# **SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE 45TH CONVOCATION OF UTKAL UNIVERSITY**

**Bhubaneswar, Odisha: 25-04-2013**

1. I am very happy to be here to participate in the 45<sup>th</sup> Convocation of Utkal University, and address this gathering of eminent academicians, intellectuals and students. This University, which was started in 1943 in a rented building in Cuttack, stands today as an important centre of higher education in the Eastern Region. With 27 post graduate departments, 2 law colleges, a distance education institution and 365 affiliated colleges, the expanse of this University is both a matter of pride and satisfaction. I am indeed honoured to be in this University whose foundation stone was laid by Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India, and which was inaugurated by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the second President of our country.
2. In the Convocation Address in this very University on 2<sup>nd</sup> January, 1963, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan had said and I quote: *“It is my hope that this seat of learning may produce men and women who will live, love, take risks, be prepared to suffer and create a civilized society”* (unquote). This brings to my mind, the story of a young man who was fired by the idea of freedom struggle. For him, this struggle had no territorial limits. In the prime of his youth, he risked his life by flying an aircraft into the territory of an imperial power and rescued two great Indonesian freedom fighters and brought them back to safety in India. This young man could have lost his life, bringing an early end to the story of a political statesman of contemporary India. His name was Biju Patnaik. I pay my respectful homage to this great son of India.
3. Maharaja Krushna Chandra Gajapati, Shri Biswanath Das, Pandit Nilakanth Das and Pandit Godavarish Mishra played a vital role in the establishment of Utkal University. It is also an occasion to pay tribute to illustrious teachers like Prof. Pranakrushna Parija, Prof. V.V. John, Prof. Ganeswar Mishra, Prof. Bidyadhar Mishra, Prof. M.N. Das, Prof. Sriram Chandra Dash, Prof. A. Ayyapan and Prof. S.K. Das. It was their vision and supreme endeavor that earned Utkal University a distinct identity and a pride of place among universities in the country.
4. Ladies and Gentlemen, education is a powerful tool for human progress and empowerment. It is also a strong driver of social thinking and transformation.

5. The recent increase in cases of brutal assault on women and child rape has shaken the collective conscience of the nation. These unfortunate incidents underscore the urgency for our society to pause and introspect at the erosion of values and our repeated failure to ensure safety and security of our women and children. Such criminal depravity is a threat to the civilized functioning of society. We must identify its causes and find solutions to it. The society must ensure the dignity and respect for women.
6. In my Address to the Nation on the eve of the last Republic Day, I had stated that it is time for the nation to reset its moral compass. I call upon those who educate and nurture the minds of the youth, and who wield moral authority in the society to set this process in motion. Our universities and academic institutions must take a lead in imparting education which will help us meet the moral challenge of our times. It must help us build a modern democracy based on values of human dignity and equality.
7. Ladies and Gentlemen, our Constitution has laid down that we have to build our society based on the freedom of human spirit, economic opportunities for all and social justice. We have to make economic growth work for the betterment of our people, especially those at the bottom of the socio-economic pyramid. Our strategy of inclusive economic growth has shown positive results. Our average annual economic growth during the last 10 years was 7.9 per cent though it has decelerated to 5.0 per cent in 2012-13. But I am confident that with the measures being taken, we would return to 7 to 8 per cent growth level in the next two to three years.
8. Distributive justice, as a higher goal of democratic polity, can be achieved only on the strength of a sound education system. The higher education system in India rests on the three pillars of quality, affordability and accessibility. At the end of the Eleventh Five Year Plan period, there were a total of 659 degree awarding institutions and over 33,000 colleges. The total enrolment of students in higher education, which was 2.6 crore at the end of the Eleventh Plan period, is envisaged to increase to 3.6 crore at the end of the Twelfth Plan period.
9. The drive to expand higher education in quantitative terms must be matched by adequate efforts at quality improvement. It is a matter of deep concern that no Indian university, according to an international survey of universities, is ranked within the top 200 universities in the world. The National Knowledge Commission had identified

quality deterioration in higher education in its Report in 2006 as a '*quiet crisis that runs deep*'.

10. We must direct our energies at developing Indian universities to meet global benchmarks. There is a need to promote a culture of excellence in them. This calls for a dynamic higher education system with space for reforms.
11. Ladies and Gentlemen, the increasing number of academic institutions is not sufficient to keep pace with the growing demand. Despite India's higher education system being the second largest in the world, the enrolment rate for the 18-24 years age group in India is only 7 per cent. Compared to this, it is 21 per cent in Germany and 34 per cent in the US. This effectively denies many bright students the opportunity to acquire higher education. Building accessibility will be an important exercise in inclusion.
12. Our universities should resort to innovative ways of teaching. Technology can be harnessed for collaborative information sharing. The infrastructure of the National Mission on Education through Information and Communication Technology should be put to greater use. Transmission of important lectures to students studying in institutions located away from cities and towns can become commonplace.
13. With several competing demands on public funding, the task of meeting the growing demands in the higher education sector will have to be in part shouldered by the private sector. Many private institutions have earned international reputation for quality and standards. We should encourage the participation of private sector without compromising on the social objectives and the quality benchmarks.
14. The success of inclusion in higher education also depends on affordability. Meritorious students in difficult economic circumstances should be helped to pursue education by measures like scholarships, student loans and self-help schemes.
15. Our attention must also be focused on our colleges, as a very large chunk of students - about 87 per cent - are enrolled in affiliated colleges in the country. The affiliating universities have a great responsibility to guide these colleges to maintain high standards in curricula and evaluation.
16. Shortage of faculty is a major hindrance for delivering quality education in our universities. The standard of education cannot be allowed to suffer due to this constraint. Filling up vacancies must therefore be given higher priority.

17. Socrates had said and I quote: "*Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel*" (unquote). I am certain that our institutes of higher learning have teachers who can inspire their students to gain knowledge beyond the textbooks and discover new thinking. Such outstanding teachers must be encouraged to guide new teachers and students.
18. Ladies and Gentlemen, our economic progress will depend on our capability to innovate. India lags behind the major economies in terms of innovation. Though Indians comprise one-sixth of the world population, only one in 50 patent applications in the world are filed in India. We do not lack the capability to innovate but we lack the systems to encourage and generate innovation.
19. Our academic environment must be conducive for promotion of research. Increasing the number of research fellowships, supporting inter-disciplinary and inter-university research partnerships and establishing industry incubation parks are some of the important steps that are necessary. Our system must run flexibly to attract Indian researchers working abroad to return and work on short-term projects.
20. Innovation should benefit the common man. There are grass root innovations that require technical and commercial assistance for converting them into economically viable products. Our Universities and Industry should form linkages to support such initiatives.
21. I congratulate all the students who are getting their degrees today. Please remember that learning is a continuous process. Life will give you many opportunities to learn. Keep an open mind and be ready to meet the challenges of life with poise, sincerity and courage. My best wishes for a successful life ahead.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.

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