

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE AT THE ANNUAL DAY FUNCTION OF GONDIA
EDUCATION SOCIETY AT GONDIA, MAHARASHTRA**

Gondia, Maharashtra: February 9, 2014

1. I am happy to be here today for the Annual Day Function of the Gondia Education Society. Gondia is the gateway to Maharashtra from Central and Eastern India. I thank you for giving me this opportunity to visit this important city in the Vidarbha region of this State.

2. Today is the birth anniversary of Late Manohar-bhai Patel, the founder of this sprawling educational institution. He overcame great hardships in life and rose to become an industrialist, political leader, philanthropist and social reformer. Gondia Education Society was the culmination of his visionary efforts. It is indeed my good fortune to come on such a revered occasion. I pay my sincere homage to this noble and worthy son of India.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

3. Late Manohar-bhai Patel was born in a family of small means in Nadiad, Gujarat. He did not allow his humble moorings to come in the way of his dreams. He could not afford education and left his studies and home early to etch out a livelihood. His struggle took him to various places. He finally came to Gondia as a sixteen year old boy eager to make a mark for himself. Due to sheer hard work and sincerity, he established himself as an industrialist. He also became a prominent public figure in the State, getting elected to the Assembly four times. Inspired by Gandhian ideals, he worked for the betterment of the society. Not to be easily swayed by the

trappings of power, he refused to join the government and instead continued rendering service as a people's leader. An idealistic human being, his sole vision was to do good to the society. As a mark of respect for his pioneering work in creating irrigation facilities in this region, the Government of Maharashtra has named one of the large reservoir projects as 'Manohar Sagar'.

4. Late Manohar-bhai Patel was deeply disturbed at the state of education in Gondia district. He felt the six per cent literacy rate in the area during that time to be completely unacceptable. He felt that such low educational levels will hold back the potential of the people to achieve progress and prosperity. His regret of not receiving education spurred him to undertake an ambitious venture to uplift the educational infrastructure of this region. His missionary zeal in this direction was evident from the fact that on one single day, I am told, he opened 22 high schools and two senior colleges in Gondia and Bhandara districts.
5. The initiative taken by him has today grown into a massive educational conclave in this region. The Gondia Education Society can today proudly boast of a system providing complete educational experience from the basic level to post graduation. Its 60 colleges and high schools cater to the educational requirements of over one lakh students. Higher education in colleges of this Society offers exposure to large number of traditional as well as new-age disciplines. I am happy to hear success stories of students who have been educated at this Society's colleges.
6. The educational philosophy of the Gondia Education Society is admirable. The not-for-profit institutions of the Society aim at providing world-class facilities at an affordable cost. Scholarships and free education provided to the young students of the Gondia and Bhandara districts help them to pursue their dreams with

confidence. I urge the Society to continue the splendid work being carried out in the field of education with the same spirit and energy.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

7. The youth of any country is the crucial backbone for its future development and progress. India is fortunate to have a large young population to take forward her aspirational agenda of change. The 13-35 years' age group in our country accounts for more than 40 per cent of the population. The proportion of working age population between 15 and 59 years is increasing, with 63.5 million being added likely to this group between 2011 and 2016. Within a decade, India will have the world's largest workforce, which will account for two-third of her population.
8. A larger proportion of active population can deliver our country great advantage, provided we are able to reap the benefits. We have to make our manpower capable, so that they become active participants in the development process. As per a recent survey, only 34 per cent of our students were found to be employable. If job-led growth is one of our key strategies for inclusive development, then drastic action is needed to make the graduates passing out of our education system competent and employable. We have to make them educationally sound and socially sensitive. The grounding of our country's workforce has to begin right from the school level.
9. We have to expand our educational system and make it more accessible and affordable. We also have to give thrust on upgrading standards in our academic institutions. Adopting the open and distance learning mode and leveraging technology solutions hold great promise to address both quantity and quality concerns. Information and communication technology solutions have the potential to address a multitude of shortages like faculty, infrastructure and resources that keeps an institution away from becoming globally acclaimed. I am confident that the institutions of

this Society will offer a world class learning experience to its students.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

10. I am told that students from the Gondia Education Society have done well for themselves. Many have gone abroad to follow their life's calling. I am sure you all will do well in life. With success, comes responsibility. With greater success, comes greater responsibility. You have to be true to the ideals that your institution stands for. You ought to give back to the society what you have gained here. You ought to have a strong sense of patriotism and social responsibility. Those of you who want to undergo higher studies in premier institutions abroad deserve encouragement. But remember: wherever you go, retain the sacred bond with your motherland.
11. Do your best for the development of our country. Be open to ideas from all sides. But never ape others blindly. Never allow others to dominate our thinking. Mahatma Gandhi had captured this thought beautifully when he said and I quote: "*I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. I refuse to live in other people's houses as an interloper, a beggar or a slave.*" (unquote). Be firmly rooted to our reality. Then only, you will have the means as well as the will power to effect positive change.
12. With these words, I conclude. I thank you once again for inviting me to be a part of this occasion. I wish all of you the very best in life.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.
