

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE
ON THE OCCASION OF RECEIVING THE FIRST COPY OF THE BOOK
'THE FUTURE OF INDIAN UNIVERSITIES: COMPARATIVE AND
INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES'**

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I am indeed very happy to welcome all of you to the Rashtrapati Bhawan. It is indeed my pleasure to receive the first copy of the book-The Future of Indian Universities: Comparative and International Perspectives edited by Professor Raj Kumar, founding Vice Chancellor of O. P. Jindal Global University and published by Oxford University Press, India.

2. I would like to congratulate Professor Raj Kumar and all other contributors for their efforts in coming up with a book on a very important and pertinent topic that addresses the future of universities in India.

3. I am happy that Professor Amartya Sen is present with us on this occasion. It is with pleasure, I acknowledge the august gathering of academicians, policy makers and other dignitaries who have come together to attend this function.

4. I have had the occasion to interact with O.P. Jindal Global University a number of times, including release of two books, inauguration of international conferences on higher education and futuristic universities, and a summit on world-class universities. JGU is an example of how with determined efforts, focus on research, significant number of publications and international collaborations, a university can cover a long distance in a short span of just eight years.

5. Ladies and Gentlemen, India has a long history of higher education. Some of the oldest institutions of higher learning such as Nalanda, Vikramshila (in India), and Taxila (now in Pakistan), etc. dating back to the 5th century BC, were located within the Indian subcontinent. These seats of higher learning attracted teachers, researchers and students from across the world. They produced mighty minds that shaped the politics, arts, culture, science and economics for over a millennium.

6. The higher education system we inherited was designed and established by the British colonial masters. Though designed for providing lower level civil servants, this system ironically opened the way for producing many highly educated professionals and even noted scholars, who made ground-breaking scientific discoveries and went on to become even Nobel laureates.

7. However, the needs of our contemporary times are very different from the aims and objectives of the colonial rulers that established the modern Indian higher education system. Our needs today are much more complex. Along with the post-independence emphasis on Nation-building through institution-building, we are now increasingly called upon to think about the role of Universities in the larger global context of an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world. The Universities of today are being called upon to compete globally for research-ranking to help build “World-Class Universities”.

8. Higher education systems around the world are going through a massive overhaul. What should the Universities of the Future look like? What should be the curriculum of the Universities of the future? What should be the pedagogy of the Universities of the future? What kind of graduates these Universities should produce? These are questions troubling many academics and world leaders.

9. Today we have assembled here for the release of the book- “The Future of Indian Universities: Comparative and International Perspectives” by a Nobel Laureate economist and philosopher, who was born in the land of the first futuristic global-minded University of modern India, i.e., *Shantiniketan*, the campus of Rabindranath Tagore's Viswa-Bharati University. Most of his early education also took place in Patha Bhavan School set up by Tagore in Shantinikentan, where many progressive pedagogic ideas were put into practice. The curriculum and pedagogy in the school was not exam-oriented. Students enjoyed freedom to explore their inner creativity. Their natural curiosity to learn and explore their environment was encouraged. The school also stressed cultural diversity and embraced influences from the rest of the world. These ideals of education were also embedded in conceptualizing Viswa-Bharati University, as is evident from the following quote of Gurudev Rabindra Nath Tagore, elucidated in his ‘Ideal of Education:-

“University is there to offer us opportunity for working together in a common pursuit of truth, sharing together our common intellectual heritage, to enable us to realize that artists in all parts of the world have created forms of beauty, scientists discovered secrets of the material universe, philosophers solved the problems of existence, saints made spiritual truths organic in their lives, not merely for some particular race to which they belonged, but for all mankind.

When we understand this truth in a disinterested spirit, it teaches us to respect all the differences in man that are real, yet remain conscious of our oneness, and to know that perfection of unity is not in uniformity, but in harmony.”

- Tagore, (*"The Ideal of Education"*, *Visva-Bharati News*, January 1934, p.5)

10. I would, therefore, urge all distinguished guests assembled here to think about the future of Indian Universities as a continuation of India's rich history and heritage of education. We would do well to take from reforms by great philosophers and visionaries, such as Tagore, who sought to revive the ancient Buddhist tradition of higher learning and research in a "common pursuit of truth" for all mankind. As our "Universities of the Future" gear up for global competition to find their place on the tables of institutional rankings, let us not forget the difference between "world-class" and "world-minded".

11. Let our "Universities of the Future" re-invent our rich past heritage of "Kautuhalshala" (An assembly of inquisitive minds raising questions), hitherto silenced by the pedagogy of rote-memorising for test. Let our students raise important research questions and break new grounds in scientific discoveries, artistic creativity and philosophical ruminations. Let our "Universities of the Future" help reproduce the next generation of great scientists, philosophers, artists, teachers, doctors, engineers and innovators.

12. In the pursuit of these Kautuhalshalas, let us reinforce the glorific spirit of India where 'shashtarth', 'tark' and 'vad vivaad', – continuous dialectics, led to constant synthesis. Let us, as I have said on many earlier occasions, produce Argumentative and Pragmatic Indians rather than intolerant and dogmatic citizens.

13. Friends, I take this opportunity to congratulate the Founding Chancellor of O.P. Jindal Global University, Shri Naveen Jindal for his generous philanthropy for establishing the O.P. Jindal Global University in memory of his late father, Shri O.P. Jindal and the Founding Vice Chancellor Professor Raj Kumar for his visionary leadership and appreciate both of them for their outstanding contributions to institution building for nation building. JGU is an example of what corporate philanthropy can do for transforming the field of Higher Education.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.
