

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE GOLDEN JUBILEE CONVOCATION OF PT. RAVISHANKAR SHUKLA UNIVERSITY

Raipur, Chhattisgarh: July 26, 2014

1. I am happy to be here today to attend the Golden Jubilee Convocation of Pt. Ravishankar Shukla University. At the outset, let me thank you for inviting me to be a part of this historic occasion.
2. I am glad to use this opportunity to once again visit Chhattisgarh, a place steeped in history, culture and heritage. It is considered the land of *Kaushalya*, mother of Lord Ram, and the *Tapo-bhumi* of Valmiki. The 800 year rule by the Kalchuri dynasty left an important legacy – the panchayati raj system, which is one of the oldest in the country. Swami Vivekananda stayed at Raipur for many years during his childhood. Mahatma Gandhi came to Chhattisgarh to acknowledge the participation of its nationalists in the freedom struggle. Sant Kabir and Guru Baba Ghasidas, the two saints renowned for their deep spiritual wisdom, have a large following here. The rich demographic profile of Chhattisgarh – almost a third of its population comprise the tribals, including some primitive tribes – has garnered the interest of anthropologists from far and wide. Chhattisgarh is blessed with nature's bounty. It has a green cover of 41 percent and rich mineral deposits of iron ore, aluminium, bauxite, tin and coal. After its formation in 2000, Chhattisgarh has emerged as one of the fast developing states. It holds promise for greater all-round development in the future.

Friends:

3. Pt. Ravishankar Shukla University is one of the oldest and largest universities of Chhattisgarh. It was formed in 1964, when this State was a part of Madhya Pradesh. Named after the first Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, it started functioning with 34 affiliated colleges. One of the first buildings to be constructed was the Library, which is named after Pt. Sundarlal Sharma, the well-known freedom fighter and social reformer of this region. This university introduced the semester system way back in 1968. It made extra-curricular activities an important part of the student's development programme. It is a matter of great satisfaction that from a humble beginning, it has made tremendous progress to be a proud higher academic repository today. It has 27 departments, 237 affiliated colleges spread over ten districts, and more than two lakh students. I congratulate all those – past and present – associated with this institution.

4. A university, which is at the apex of formal education system, has a special position in society. It is a hallowed place for the churning of knowledge and the moulding of minds. A university, and its teachers, carries a great responsibility to prepare individuals who are complete in all respects. I look upon centres of higher learning as the guiding light, not only for students, but for the society as a whole. They have to instill a belief system that is rooted in our universal wisdom and philosophy. Having a modern outlook does not imply deviating from the core values and philosophies of the yore. Our civilizational values – love for motherland; performance of duty; compassion for all; tolerance for pluralism; respect for women; honesty in life; self-restraint in conduct, responsibility in action and discipline – are true regardless of time and place. They have transcended epochs. It is the duty of our universities to pass the baton of ‘foundational values’ onto the next generation.

Dear Students:

5. Convocation is an eventful day in your life. It holds immense significance for you and for all those – your parents, teachers, relatives and friends – who have a stake in your success. You have all along dreamt to see this day. Now, you have got wings to chase your dreams. As you leave your alma mater today, be assured that your education has made you capable of enjoying a comfortable life and also prepared you to face the rough weather. As informed citizens and bright young minds, you must not only be aware of your rights but your duties and responsibilities as well. Spare a thought for your less endowed brethren who did not have the opportunity to partake in the benefits of education. You have a duty to work towards their upliftment. You must harmonize your personal goals and societal commitments. It is possible to conciliate between the two. For that, you must be driven by a sense of obligation towards your country. I am confident that you will make good use of the education you have received here. Remember the words of Swami Vivekananda, which I now quote: *“All power is within you; you can do anything and everything; believe in that, do not believe that you are weak”* (unquote).

Friends:

6. One of the fundamental duties of an Indian citizen enshrined in our Constitution is *“to strive towards excellence in all spheres of individual and collective activity so that the nation constantly rises to higher levels of endeavour and achievement”*. To enable the ingenuity and industry of young Indians to spur national progress, we require a sound education system. Though we can boast of a vast higher education network of over 720 degree-awarding institutions and 37,000 colleges, standards in many of them leave much to be desired. In the distant past, universities like Nalanda and

Takshashila were global leaders in higher education. The story is different today. As per reputed agencies, there is not a single Indian institution amongst the top 200 universities in the world.

7. A country like India, having the largest young population in the world, must be better equipped in preparing human resource. A culture of excellence must be promoted in our higher academic institutions. Core competencies must be nurtured. Academic cooperation between institutions must be encouraged. Research must be of a high order and prioritized keeping in mind local issues as well as fields of specialization. Institutional mechanisms like innovation clubs must be created to unearth and support potential grassroots innovation.
8. Teaching must be top-grade and facilitated by attracting and retaining talent; hiring experts from industry, laboratories and research institutions; professional development of faculty; and laying industry-focus in the academic curricula of professional courses. Quality up-gradation of state-level institutions, which account for 96 percent of the higher education capacity, must be accorded high priority. The Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) is an important initiative in this direction. Colleges deserve special attention as a large chunk of students - about 87 percent - are enrolled in them. The affiliating universities must guide them to maintain high standards in curricula and evaluation.

Friends:

9. Expansion in the number of academic institutions has led to a gradual increase in the gross enrolment ratio during the last few years. Yet, at 18 per cent, it is less than most developed countries, and even Russia, Brazil and China. Owing to various factors, many bright students in our country are still denied the opportunity to acquire higher education. Greater affordability and enhanced accessibility is the key. These will result in greater inclusivity in higher education. Meritorious students from difficult economic backgrounds must be assisted through scholarships, student loans and self-help schemes.
10. To improve access, ICT solutions must be applied in our institutions. Massive open online courses (MOOCs) help bridge distances to provide education to students located far away from urban centres. ICT networks like the National Knowledge Network (NKN) facilitates knowledge diffusion through sharing of lectures and course material. It enables intellectual collaboration by encouraging experts separated by geography to interact. I am pleased to know that this University is already on NKN since 2010.
11. With these words, I conclude. I once again wish all of you on this august occasion. May you all excel in life.

Thank you. Jai Hind.