

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,  
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND  
AT THE ROUNDTABLE WITH INDOLOGISTS AT CHARLES UNIVERSITY**

**Prague, September 8, 2018**

1. I am delighted to be here and to share my thoughts with you. I take this opportunity to thank Dr. Zima, Rector of the Charles University and the Faculty members, for providing me an opportunity to witness the rich history of this temple of learning.
2. I am impressed by your presentations in different languages of India. I deeply appreciate your pursuit of knowledge and academic excellence as students of Indology.
3. Charles University, is known to be one of the oldest institutions in Europe, with a long tradition of scholarship. As I speak here, I feel proud to be at such a great seat of knowledge. It delights me that Rabindranath Tagore, our national poet and one of the greatest sons of India, once came to this very campus and delivered a thought provoking speech, captivating many. He is the one who called Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, “Mahatma” or “the Great Soul”, first. I have just had the honour to illuminate the life and legacy of our Father of the Nation and pay my respects. On 2<sup>nd</sup> October, in less than a month’s time from now, we would be launching our worldwide celebrations of his 150<sup>th</sup> birthday. I do hope all of you will join us.
4. It is interesting to trace the history of interaction between our two countries. It goes much before the links established by Indologists. It may amuse you but about a millennia back, the Kingdom of Bohemia and India had a flourishing trade in spices and silk. On that shared past, today we have built a strong contemporary partnership.
5. Indology has a very old tradition in Prague, starting with the establishment of a Chair in Sanskrit, at this University, in 1850. Prof. Lesny was one of the founding fathers of the Czech school of Indology and a friend of Rabindranath Tagore. He was the first European Indologist who translated Tagore’s poetry directly from Bengali instead

of using English translations. On the invitation of Prof. Lesny, Tagore visited erstwhile Czechoslovakia in 1921 and 1926. I take this moment in paying my personal homage to Dr. Hana Preinhaelterova, who passed away recently. Dr Hana has done remarkable work on Tagore and other Indian subjects.

6. Tagore's interaction with the scholars in Czechoslovakia, left a deep impact on them. The installation of his bust in Prague, and naming the tram station "Thakurova" after him, is a homage to our national poet and his poetic genius.
7. Prof. Dusan Zbavitel, student of Prof. Lesny carried forward the tradition and studied various Indian subjects. He has translated 60 Sanskrit works, including the Upanishads and was conferred with the highly prestigious award - the Padma Bhushan - in 2006, for his contribution to Indology by the Government of India. Another Indologist, Josef Zubaty wrote extensively on Vedic literature and Indian epics. All these Indologists exposed the lyrical beauty of Indian literature to the Czech people, bringing our cultural traditions closer to each other.
8. Although Indology began almost two centuries ago with the study of Sanskrit texts, its ambit today has become much broader. The field of Indology exemplifies how specialists across disciplines often come together to offer a deeper understanding of Indian culture and civilization. Remote sensing studies of the Ghaggar-Hakra basin have changed our understanding of the Harappan civilization and the role of a lost river - Saraswati - that once flowed in those plains and was celebrated in Vedic literature. This wonderful cooperation among different disciplines presents a great opportunity to rediscover aspects of ancient Indian wisdom that can solve many of our contemporary problems. Studies on Yoga have confirmed the positive impact it has on human health and wellbeing. I am happy to learn that Yoga and Ayurveda have been receiving overwhelming support and interest in the Czech Republic.
9. Indology has not just brought our two countries together. It has had an enormous impact in the making of Modern India. It rediscovered India's rich past and triggered a cultural awakening. It enabled India to imbibe and assimilate modernity without letting go of its cultural roots. From

Vidyasagar to Vivekananda and from Tagore to Mahatma Gandhi, one finds that the socio-cultural modernisation of India was built upon a foundation that emphasised an organic synthesis of the eastern and western thought. Indological studies continue to bind the world into that universal family where there are no barriers and no walls.

10. I am delighted to know that about 500 Indian students are pursuing their studies at various universities in the Czech Republic. Many of them have completed their studies and are working as lecturers and scientists. In them, you will find great support for your Indological pursuits.
11. Ladies and Gentlemen, I once again take this opportunity to thank the Rector of the Charles University and all the Faculty members for their relentless efforts to bring our two peoples and cultures together. I wish you all success in completing your education and realizing your dreams.

Thank you!