

# **INAUGURAL ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF INDOLOGISTS**

*Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi: Nov 21, 2015*

Ladies and Gentlemen:

1. It is, indeed, a great privilege for me to be present amidst you this morning. We welcome you all to the first ever International Conference of Indologists being hosted at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. It was hardly six months ago, in Moscow that I committed to host a working meeting of eminent experts on India's unique heritage of art and culture, science and philosophy. As a student of history and Visitor of 114 institutions of higher learning in India, I had been keen to see such a gathering of scholarly Indologists at Rashtrapati Bhavan. I am happy that learned discussions will take place here over the next three days on the civilization that is India. I wanted the thoughts and perspectives that emerge from such informed exchanges to enlighten and inspire - for there cannot be a conversation about India that does not do so.

2.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

3. The uniqueness of Indian religion, language and culture has, since ancient times, attracted travellers from faraway lands. Ancient India had world-renowned seats of higher learning. For about eighteen hundred years beginning 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, Indian universities like Takshashila, Nalanda, Vikramashila, Valabhi, Somapura and Odantapuri had dominated the world education system. They were a magnet for the finest minds and scholars in the world. Takshashila became the meeting point of four civilizations – Indian, Persian, Greek and Chinese – and was frequented by legendary personalities like Chandragupta Maurya, Chanakya, Panini, St. Thomas, Faxian, Charaka and Democritus. Indian scholarship, which had already achieved

great heights, fascinated all who encountered it. From Megasthenes to Hiuen Tsang, Fa Hien, Hyecho and Al-Barauni, these scholars of Indian studies spread their understanding of India near and far.

4. Indology, as we know it today, is a relatively new academic discipline. It took shape in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century after this area of study developed on the foundation laid by 18<sup>th</sup> century pioneers including William Jones, Henry Thomas Colebrooke and August Wilhelm Schlegel. Max Muller, the German-born philologist of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was one of the founders of the academic field of Indian studies. His works on Indology command great respect. Organizations like the Asiatic Society, the Royal Asiatic Society, the American Oriental Society and German Oriental Society as well as the Japanese Association of Indian and Buddhist Studies have also played a key role in the evolution of Indology.

4. I would like to pay tribute to all Indologists and scholars of Indian history, art and culture, science and philosophy the world over. They have, over the centuries, contributed to the understanding, propagation and promotion of the Indian knowledge system in countries far and wide.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

5. I am delighted to confer today the first 'Distinguished Indologist Award' on the distinguished Prof. Emeritus Heinrich Freiherr Von Stietencron of the Federal Republic of Germany. He has been selected for his significant contribution to Indology. He has spent a lifetime as a researcher, teacher, academician and epigrapher on various aspects of the history of Indian religions and the study of regional traditions in Odisha. His research has resulted in as many as nineteen books and almost a hundred scientific research papers. His work has added quality and substance to indological studies and will go a long way in encouraging future efforts in this direction. I

thank the eminent jury for their selection and I congratulate the learned Professor for this distinction conferred on him.

6. I compliment the External Affairs Minister and Indian Council for Cultural Relations for instituting this Award and for bringing together under our roof this outstanding group of scholars. I take this opportunity to recognize, with appreciation, the invaluable contribution of all these eminent historians and academics in exploring and disseminating the Indian knowledge system. The themes selected for this Conference will, I am sure, stimulate interesting dialogue and propagation of knowledge. The outcome of these focused sessions will, no doubt, invigorate Indology in a very definitive manner. I thank Secretary to the President, Smt. Omita Paul for so effectively converting this idea into reality.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

7. As you will agree, Indology does not merely imply the study of India. Indology is, rather, the pursuit of a major component of human knowledge; it is the understanding of the evolution of human civilization and is a science for the diagnosis and mitigation of the complexities of human life. Ancient Indians had left no stream of human consciousness unexplored - whether it was deeply delving into religion and philosophy or cracking the medicinal secrets of food. They studied, in fascinating detail, and wrote very succinctly, incredibly profound treatises on medical science, statecraft, law, social science, metallurgy, language, grammar and aesthetics. Kautilya's *Arthashastra* is a comprehensive discourse on statecraft. *Manusmriti* is a legal text studied most widely. Nourishment of body through healthy food received equal attention and *Pakshastra* (cooking) became a highly evolved subject.
8. This year, the 21<sup>st</sup> of June was celebrated as the International Day of Yoga. With this, the ancient science of

yoga has been demystified. It has been brought to the man on the street. He has learned how to make the practice of yoga a part of his daily routine. The global popularization of yoga will help to improve the lifestyle of those who adopt it and pro-actively safeguard their physical and mental well-being. I would like to encourage the younger generation of the world to study, practice and benefit from Ayurveda and other ancient Indian healing systems. I look forward to the increasing integration of this science into a holistic treatment of diseases. I would also like to see more Indology in the academic collaborations between India and her foreign partners. This will not only add new dimensions to the bilateral discourse of India with these friendly countries, but it will also create yet another layer of co-operation and mutual understanding.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

9. In ancient India, society accorded great value to novel thought. A scholar was expected to have independent views to be recognized as an erudite man or a '*hrishi*'. So rich was the intellectual discourse on all subjects concerning humanity that Tagore, in his *Geetanjali*, likened India to a "divine ocean" and said which I now quote: "*Nobody knows whose invitation has invoked so many souls who have gathered here like a turbulent current of a river that has come and dissolved itself in the Divine Ocean*"(unquote).
10. Early Indologists had relied on Sanskrit for their study of Indian culture. Sanskrit has long been the medium for studying at least two major religions of the world and eight philosophical schools. Similarly, Vedic mathematics is based in Sanskrit. As such, it is the key to a vast cache of literature, epics, aesthetics, dramaturgy, and the Indian civilization itself. It is the language of the greatest works on human development, world peace and global prosperity. The vedic texts were, perhaps, the first to pronounce the

universal concept of “*Vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, which means “the world is one family”. In the words of Mark Twain, “*India is the cradle of human race, the birthplace of human speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend and the great grandmother of tradition....*” To my mind, the popularity of Indology lies in its wide scope and capacity to reveal solutions for all possible questions that the human mind may contemplate.

11. It must be recognised that India’s ancient traditions, to survive and grow, did not hesitate to selectively embrace all that is good in modernism. Her history remains alive and vibrant in the thoughts, actions, customs and rituals of her people. Modernity, in all its manifestations is equally welcome here.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

12. We are, today, witnessing events without precedent: when the world is struggling to deal with the worst impulses of intolerance and hatred that mankind has ever witnessed. At such a time, there can be no better recourse than to remind ourselves of the high values, written and unwritten *samskaras*, duties and the way of life that is the essence of India. This is the time to reinforce the civilizational values that bind together the complex diversity of modern-day India and promote them among our people and the world.
13. As Swami Vivekananda had described so eloquently, “*If there is any land on this earth that can lay claim to be the blessed *Punya Bhumi*, to be the land to which all souls on this earth must come to account for Karma, the land to which every soul that is wending its way Godward must come to attain its last home, the land where humanity has attained its highest towards gentleness, towards generosity, towards purity, towards calmness, above all, the land of introspection and of spirituality - it is India.....It is here that*

*Indians build temples for Mohammedans and Christians; nowhere else... The one great lesson, therefore, that the world wants most, that the world has yet to learn from India, is the idea not only of toleration, but of sympathy.”*

Ladies and Gentlemen:

14. Let me hasten to clarify: I do not intend this assembly to excessively dwell on ancient times or merely fill us with nostalgia about India's grand past. Instead, I anticipate that your scholastic interactions, while firmly anchoring today's India in her glorious history – will illuminate the logical path to her destined greatness. I am confident that your deliberations over the next three days will highlight the manner in which pluralism and multi-culturalism are at the very core of the Indian psyche. They will surely make an important contribution to our existing body of knowledge in the area of Indology.
15. I commend the Government of India under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister Smt. Sushma Swaraj for the encouragement and promotion of Indological studies both in India and abroad.
16. I am confident that the focus of such initiatives will be constructive and will continue on a sustained basis.
17. With these words, I wish the Conference great success.

Thank you.  
Jai Hind!