

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE ON THE OCCASION OF THE CONVOCATION 2013 OF SIDO KANHU MURMU

Dumka, Jharkhand : 29-04-2013

1. I am happy to be present at this Convocation ceremony of SKM University, Dumka. I recall my earlier visit to your university in March, 2011 on the occasion of the Convocation 2011, and I am delighted to know that your institution has since made rapid strides. I have been informed that many new initiatives have been taken by your university to improve the standards of teaching and research. It gives me great satisfaction to know that SKM University is playing a stellar role in the socio-economic transformation of a populace which comprises large tribal populations of Paharias and Santhals. The demographics of this region and the socio-economic requirements of its tribal population make it all the more imperative that you continue in your efforts with zeal and dedication.
2. This University is a tribute to two legendary freedom fighters from this region, Sido Murmu and Kanhu Murmu. They led the Santhal rebellion popularly known as 'Santhal Hul' in 1855 against the exploitation of the colonial rule. Their contribution to the nation will remain immortalized in the name of this University. It is now for this University to spread the message and values for which these great men struggled and made the supreme sacrifice.
3. The SKM University has provided easy access to quality education to the poor students of Santhal Pargana. Ever since its inception, it has set the highest standards of excellence and quality. It is gratifying to note that the University plans to develop its own campus with modern facilities in a 109 acre area at Digghi.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. We all recognize the critical role that education plays in the development of a nation. It is the prime mover of the progress of a country.

5. The recent incidents of brutal assault and child rape have shaken our society's collective conscience. They highlight the urgency with which our society should introspect at the erosion of values and our repeated failure to ensure safety and security of our women and children. We must identify and find solutions for such criminal depravity. The dignity and respect for women must be ensured at all times.
6. In my Address to the Nation on the eve of the last Republic Day, I had stated that it is time for the nation to reset its moral compass. I call upon those who educate and nurture the minds of the youth, and who wield a moral authority in the society to set this process in motion. Our universities and academic institutions also have a responsibility to take the lead and impart education that will help us meet the moral challenge of our times. It must help in spreading the values of human dignity and equality in the society.
7. India is in the process of fast and radical change, a process which is unstoppable. However, change is occurring at very different speeds in each segment of society. The complexity of the Indian society - as embodied in division and subdivision by geography, religion, caste, class, gender and employment- calls for a careful monitoring and deft steering of this process of change. The successful management of this change is the biggest challenge of our times. Our response to this challenge will determine the destiny of India as a nation. We simply cannot fail in this test.

Ladies and gentlemen,

8. I believe that we can turn this challenge into opportunity. The present demographic profile of India lends strong credence to this belief. According to an estimate, by the year 2020 the average age of India will be 29 years. It will be much lower than the average of 40 years in the U S, 46 years in Japan, and 47 years in Europe. Over two-thirds of Indians will be of working age by

2025. If we are able to harness this potential and channelize the productive energy of youth, we can transform the economic fortunes of our country. But if we fail to do so, the historical opportunity offered by this demographic dividend - an opportunity that comes only rarely in the life of a nation - will be lost with terrible consequences.

9. To make the most of this opportunity we must invest in education. It will be a race against time, given present state of our education sector, especially higher education. According to an international survey of universities, not a single Indian university figures in the list of top 200 universities in the world. While in the global list we did not figure at all, we had only 11 institutes in the best 300 hundred Asian universities. This situation must change.
10. In the world of globalization, universities are regarded as crucial national assets. Governments around the world have invested heavily in universities. They are seen as vital sources of new knowledge and innovative thinking, and as providers of skilled personnel with credible credentials. Besides, they are also acting as magnets of international talent and business investment into a region, as agents of social justice and mobility, and as resources of cultural and social vitality.

Ladies and gentlemen,

11. The question to ask ourselves is, are our universities up to the job? There is need for Indian universities to catch up with counterparts in the quality of teaching and research. Research and innovation must be given new impetus. Out of 260 lakh students who were enrolled at the undergraduate level and above in 2011-12, only one lakh or 0.4 per cent had registered for PhD. The total number of patent applications filed by Indians in 2010, was close to only six thousand, while 3 lakh applications were filed by Chinese, around 1.7 lakh filed by Germans, 4.5 lakh by Japanese, and 4.2 lakh by Americans. The number of patent applications by Indians comprised only 0.3 per cent of the

total applications filed in the world, a disappointing figure for a country with a share of 17 per cent in world population. These figures indicate the challenges to India's global aspirations.

12. We have to equip our universities with the necessary facilities without any further delay. Shortage of faculty should be seen as a core concern. In central universities close to 51% of posts of professors are lying vacant. In state universities the conditions are far worse. Higher educational institutions also suffer from large quality variation. A recent NASSCOM - McKinsey Report has said that not more than 15 per cent of graduates of general education and 25 per cent of technical education are fit for employment.
13. While urgent steps are being taken to fill the vacancies, we can evolve new ways of employing technology-based learning and collaborative information and communication sharing. Lectures by eminent professors could be transmitted to educational institutions situated away from the main towns and cities using the facilities offered by the National Mission on Education through Information and Communication Technology (NMEICT). Refresher courses conducted by Academic Staff Colleges may also be similarly transmitted. Every university should identify a group of 10 to 20 teachers who can ignite the minds of the students beyond the textbooks. If such teachers regularly interact with each other as well as with students, the quality of teaching could be considerably enhanced. Their lectures could also be relayed to remote educational institutions through NMEICT Networks.
14. Open and Distance Learning can also aid in enhancing the reach of higher education. It is gratifying to know that enrolment in such programmes increased from 27 lakh to 42 lakh during the Eleventh Plan period.
15. We must promote a culture of excellence in our education system. At least one department in every university should be transformed into a Centre of

Excellence. To achieve this, the Ministry of Human Resource Development, the UGC and the Universities would have to work together in close collaboration.

Ladies and gentlemen,

16. With a view to evolving a time-bound action plan and making innovative changes in the higher education sector, a conference of Vice Chancellors of Central Universities was organised in Rashtrapati Bhavan in February this year. The Conference identified certain immediate, short-term and medium-term measures that are being worked upon by the Ministry of Human Resource Development. I hope to see substantial progress in the implementation of these measures by the time next conference is held in February 2014.
17. On the eve of India's 66th Independence on August 14 last year, I had observed that the glass of modern India was more than half-full. I had said that we are equal children before our mother, and India asks each one of us, in whatever role we play in the complex drama of nation building, to do our duty with integrity, commitment and unflinching loyalty to the values enshrined in our constitution. If each one of us follow this principle, I am confident India will become a more vibrant, dynamic and prosperous nation.
18. Convocation is a joyous occasion in the life of a university. It marks the culmination of a phase of learning and is a special day in its academic calendar. I take this opportunity to congratulate all the students graduating today, and the University on providing them the opportunity to pursue their academic goals.
19. I hope that your training and education from this esteemed institution will help you face challenges of the competitive world, and that you will contribute in

your own way towards the progress and prosperity of the nation as well as this State.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.