

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE NATIONAL SEMINAR ON "CHALLENGES OF MODERN WORLD: SOLUTIONS THROUGH INDOLOGY" ORGANIZED BY THE KURUKSHETRA UNIVERSITY

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1. It gives me great pleasure to be here today, in the land of the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. I am especially delighted at the opportunity to inaugurate the National Seminar titled, "Challenges of Modern World: Solutions through Indology", being organized by the Kurukshetra University.
2. On the face of it, many may consider the topic to be of little relevance. But it holds great importance to the modern times and can offer guidance to the resolution of several of its problems. It is also not very common for universities to select such a complex and challenging topic for the seminar. Let me congratulate the Vice Chancellor and his team for this decision.
3. The origin of Indology studies can be traced to the Asiatic Society established in Calcutta in 1784 by Sir William Jones. The second centre of importance, the Oriental Institute, was established in 1893 by the then Maharaja of Baroda. The Institute is credited with having published original works on various issues relating to Hindu Law, Buddhism and Jainism. Several other Indology institutes have been established since then.
4. The Theosophical Society established in Madras in 1882 is another such centre which has done original research in Indology. The movement was supported by eminent personalities like A.O. Hume and Gopalakrishna Gokhale.
5. The Theosophical Society studies on Indology received an impetus with the arrival of Annie Besant in 1893 to work for the organisation. She authored many books on Indian society and its culture giving a new dimension to Indology studies. Soon, interest on Indology had spread throughout Europe primarily in France and Germany. Some of the famous American Universities like Harvard and Yale have Indology centres.
6. Despite the increasing interest in Indology, it failed to gain greater momentum both in India and abroad. In India, it is attributable to the lack of employment opportunities of those engaged in Indology and the influence of western ideology. This has affected the quality of research on the subject. Consequently, though rich in literature, Indology has not been able to withstand the domination of western thoughts and theories.
7. It resulted in the domination of English and research based on western philosophy making it unidimensional. The view of the world seen through western eyes distorted the understanding of the Indian culture, in what one author has called the 'Europeanization of Earth'.
8. In Europe, many saw Indology as relating to the pre-history period thereby degrading its relevance. Consequently, the advancement made by India in

the field of medicine, mathematics and astronomy received inadequate attention.

9. But in a world focused on materialism and where many see the end justifying the means, the study of Indian culture can give an alternate model. Our cultural history is rich. The wealth of our works stand bequeathed to the benefit of this modern world.
10. The underlying moral teachings in Bhagavad Gita, for instance, can emphasize the need to adhere to righteous path even in the face of adversity. At the beginning of the war between the Pandavas and Kauravas, Lord Shri Krishna delivered the celestial sermon of *Bhagavad Gita* to an ambivalent Arjuna and showed him the path of righteousness and the true duty of a warrior. It made him conscious of the compelling obligation to perform his duty burying his personal interests. Its message is truly universal and if followed can prevent many of the conflicts that the world today is forced to come to terms with.
11. Friends, our languages and literature are our shared heritage. Classical Indian languages like Sanskrit and Tamil, with rich original literary and grammatical traditions, are amongst the longest surviving languages in the world.
12. The sacred works in these languages have partly driven the development of modern Hinduism.
13. The wealth of information and advice contained in the works in several Indian languages and Indian philosophy can provide answers to both individuals and nations. Answers to the myriad problems that confront the mortal life can be unlocked from India's ancient literary treasures.
14. Friends, *dharma* and *artha* are the important goals for leading a meaningful life. *Dharma* is both a law and a duty in itself. Anything that sustains social order and accentuates moral development of an individual is *dharma*. Its observance guarantees peace and harmony to all.
15. *Artha* is a basic necessity of life. The need for economic well-being to lead a decent and fulfilling life is embedded in it. The value of *artha* was described by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan when he wrote (quote): "*There was never in India a national ideal of poverty and squalor. Spiritual life finds full scope only in communities of certain degree of freedom from sordidness. Lives that are strained and starved cannot be religious except in rudimentary way. Economic insecurity and individual freedom do not go together.*" (unquote)". Realisation of this reality would help reduce inequality among people.
16. We must bear in mind that in the long-standing Indian tradition, *artha* or wealth has never been an end but a means. Wealth should be a medium to fulfill the basic needs rather than a goal to be pursued. The pursuit of wealth should not blind the seeker to the righteousness path. If accumulation of material wealth is made the singular objective of life, one is in the danger of being trapped in the vicious cycle of pleasure and pain. Realisation of this universal truth would moderate the mindless pursuit of wealth and imbibe in both individuals and nations the need for philanthropy.

17. At the international level, the world appears to be enamoured by the concept of realpolitik. But it cannot bring lasting peace but instability. Notions of international brotherhood or *Vishwa Bandhutva* that are embedded in Indian culture and tradition can provide impetus to a world where nations are threatening each other with nuclear annihilation.
18. The maxim *Vasudeva kutumbakam* instructs us to treat the whole world like a family. Our traditional understanding calls for the essential fraternity and friendship amongst societies and countries.
19. Friends, the modern world is locked in many conflicts. Our lives are characterized by aspiration, competition and struggle. Material well-being has today virtually set every man against another in a battle called the '*survival of the fittest*'. But in the necessity to survive and race to the top, there are many who throw moral values to the winds. In the battle, everyone is overcome by anxiety and disquiet. Its result is illusory. The ancient scriptures and literatures contain valuable wisdom that denotes the true meaning of notions such as life, happiness, peace, prosperity, duty and obligation.
20. These are time-insured and relevant to the contemporary world. To find answers to the doubts and questions on *life* principles, we should have a proper re-look at our ancient texts. To equip ourselves to filter the stress of mundane life, reliance on the valuable knowledge in our scriptures is necessary.
21. Great men and thinkers of the nineteenth century have contributed towards reformation of society and upliftment of the human mind. Socio-religious movements like Arya Samaj, Brahma Samaj, Prarthana Samaj and Theosophical Society had lent a direction that was new for that age but old in respect of our ancient philosophical understanding. These movements had stressed on the inculcation of the tenets of righteousness in the daily routine of the people's lives.
22. Friends, the time has come once again to propagate to the world the values and lessons contained in our rich traditions. The importance of imparting moral lessons to children should be rightly understood. The University Education Commission of 1948-49 under Dr. S. Radhakrishnan had recommended imparting moral education in our universities and colleges. Our institutes of learning should offer courses on life management to orient the students with the diverse perspectives of life to give them a different world view of modernity.
23. I am hopeful that seminars such as the one being conducted here would take the imperative of teaching and understanding of Indology to the centre stage of national discourse.
24. Kurukshetra University enjoys a reputation for imparting quality education conforming to global standards. A testimony to this fact is the 'A' Grade accreditation by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council, Bengaluru.
25. The University's emphasis on all round development of students through promotion of sports and co-curricular programmes is commendable. I am

told that it has produced nine Arjuna Awardees, two Dronacharya Awardees and one Major Dhyan Chand Awardee.

26. I applaud the efforts of the Kurukshetra University for this initiative. I wish all of you true success and happiness in life.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.
