

**SPEECH OF SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE, FORMER PRESIDENT OF  
INDIA FOR THE 7TH EDITION OF THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS  
GROUPS'S THINKEDU CONCLAVE**

**CHENNAI: 13.02.2019**

I am happy to be addressing such a large gathering of respected academics, friends from the parliament, bureaucrats and above all, young and vibrant students whom I consider the bedrock that our great country's future rests upon. It is indeed gratifying that the New Indian Express Group, at the seventh edition of their ThinkEdu Conclave dealing with education, has chosen to deliberate upon the topic ***Education Architecture for an Inclusive India***”.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen,

2. At the outset, I must commend The New Indian Express Group for being one of the few media groups to provide this important platform to discuss the issues surrounding education in India and to ideate and find new ideas for an India that is in a state of rapid evolution. It is heartening to know that with this year's focus on ***Education Architecture for an Inclusive India***, the conclave will examine vital issues such as what kind of new education system and curriculum will be best suited for the future while also examining whether the right amount of patriotism, respect and love for our great nation is being instilled in every young man and woman born in this great nation. It is often said, ***to learn to speak is a necessity, but to know when to speak is an acquired art***. I hope that the speakers who discuss these ideas will be able to draw a path for our policymakers to build an Inclusive Education System that would have made the Founding Fathers of our nation, proud.

3. As a nation whose great, and possibly unparalleled history, shows a thirst for formal education unlike any other, it is only natural for us to expect the best of our young students. This generation is faced with a unique opportunity that India has never had the privilege of having all these years — we will soon have one of the youngest populations anywhere in the world. But we, as teachers and citizens of this nation, must ask ourselves this: Are we teaching them to be the kind of Indians who will make our country more developed, prosperous and proud? According to the 2011 Census, there has been an 8.66% growth in the literacy rate in India. But we need to honestly answer if this growth rate has been inclusive. Does this growth rate also apply to all those who could not gain access to basic education? To get the real picture of the status of literacy, these aspects have to be necessarily deliberated upon.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen

4. I would first like to share my views about the **basic requirement of our future education architecture**. I do not know whether I shall be able to see a developed India in my lifetime. Our collective dream will be fulfilled only when we build upon creative ideas of all citizens, by providing them pathway to persevere, sustain, and make a difference. I suggest **Nine Sutras** to invigorate India's march towards a more inclusive, diverse, sustainable and innovative society:

a) **One: We should not snub children when they ask questions** to which we have no answer. We should admit our ignorance, seek relevant information from those who may know and then **adequately address their curiosity**.

b) **Two:** We should **promote and reinforce a scientific temper** by questioning our beliefs which are not compatible with scientific way of thinking. The futuristic societies are built upon unconventional ideas. They are not afraid of failures; they take risks and forgive well intentioned mistakes.

c) **Three: Innovation clubs and tinkering labs should be set up** in schools, colleges and research institutions. Youth must learn to search, spread, and celebrate inclusive innovations and sense the unmet social needs of communities in their hinterland.

d) **Four:** we should **build viable and sustainable bridges between formal and informal knowledge systems.** As resources become scarce, we will have to learn to share more and more. The value system which promotes public and common good over individual interest should power individual entrepreneurship.

e) **Five:** we must **give due recognition to cultural, technological and traditional skills** while implementing our employment guarantee schemes and skill development programmes. Nobody is, truly speaking, unskilled. A knowledge society has to **harness unique strengths of each person.**

f) **Six:** We must **promote innovation** in every subset of education so that younger generation grows with a creative and problem solving mindset. We should bring our educational system **in line with contemporary societal expectations.**

g) **Seven:** There are many simple problems that we face in our daily life but we learn to live with these problems rather than **find systematic solutions.** We need to overcome the deeply-embedded

inertia in our psyche and constantly ask ourselves: how can I solve this problem? Can I still try no matter if I fail a few times?

h) **Eight:** We must **develop a sense of immediacy**. Time and tide waits for none. In a fiercely competitive environment, to be in a hurry and have some impatience is a necessary virtue.

i) **Nine:** We must **not tolerate inefficiency**, shabbiness and poor quality work. Our endeavor should be to achieve high standards of aesthetics and performance while providing goods and services.

There is a lot more that can be and should be done. I will be happy to hear from you about the ideas you have for making India a creative, compassionate, collaborative and innovative society.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen

5. Inclusion and Inclusivity is not a matter of Choice for us. It is our more than five millennium old legacy – our **Karma** as well as our **Dharma**. As the inheritors of the philosophy of “**Sarve Sukhina Bhavantu**’, ‘**Sarvodaya**’ and ‘**Antodaya**’”, we as a nation are bound by Inclusion – be it social, economic or political. The same was codified in our greatest scripture, the Constitution of India in its preamble and the chapters on Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles of State Policy. We are not only to be tolerant of difference and dissent but understanding and respectful towards all diversity. **We are one because we are diverse**. The gathering here today is one of the best manifestations of India’s liberal, democratic, multi-lingual, multi-cultural and secular society where competing ideas and ideologies have equal space. These values constitute the essence of India. As Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru had said and I quote,

*“India is a geographical and economic entity, a cultural unity amidst diversity, a bundle of contradictions held together by strong but invisible threads. Overwhelmed again and again, her spirit was never conquered and she remains unsubdued and unconquered. About her illusive quality of a legend of long ago some enchantment seems to have held her mind. She is a myth and an idea, a dream and a vision, and yet real and present and pervasive.”* (Unquote) We must do everything possible to preserve, protect, promote and nurture these ideals.

Dear Friends,

6. I want to share with you some truths that I have internalized during my fifty year long public life, as a Parliamentarian and Administrator. The soul of India resides in pluralism and tolerance. This plurality of our society has come through assimilation of ideas over centuries. Secularism and inclusion are a matter of faith for us. It is our composite culture which makes us into one nation. India's Nationhood is not One Language, One Religion, One Enemy. It is the **'Perennial Universalism'** of 1.3 billion people who use more than 122 languages and 1600 dialects in their everyday lives, practice 7 major religions, belong to 3 major ethnic groups – Caucasians, Mongoloids, and Dravidians live under one system, one flag and one identity of being **'Bhartiya'** and have **'No Animosity Towards Any'**. That is what makes Bharat a diverse and united nation.

7. Prejudice is a great barrier to inclusion. India is a land of vast diversity. My more than five decade tenure in public life taught me to find the vibrancy in this diversity. I found Inclusion to be in many things. People come from different strands of society, different classes, castes, and ethnicities, each recognized by the Supreme Law

in the Constitution of India. This diversity and plurality is an integral part of this nation, as they are an integral part of our heritage. It is along with them that our combined history is made. If you read about physics would it be fair only to read Newton? If you read literature would it be fair to only read Shakespeare? What will happen to great works of Shankaracharya, what would become of Gandhiji's "***Hind Swaraj***", I wonder. As I speak to you, it is possible that some of my words may not be internalized. However, your desire to hear my suggestion is truly exemplary of inclusion.

8. I am reminded of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore's words "***Where the Mind Is without Fear and the Head Held High***". These words have inspired me to grow, each and every single day of my life. This prayer is the need of the hour. This is the prayer that may be made today in the wake of the demand for being meaningfully educated. The mind can only be without fear and head high where the mind is aware of itself. On the battlefield of Kurukshetra Krishna says to Arjuna "***Jnanen sadrusham pavitra iha vidyate***"- which means "**Know that there is no greater purifier than knowledge**".

Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen,

9. This holds true for each of you present here today. Knowledge helps one understand of exclusion. It can understand your difficulty in acceptance. Yet it can provoke you to become a world citizen. Gurudev writes about a One World, One Humanity, "***Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls***". These narrow walls are those very biases and prejudices we hold against each other. I reiterate what I have said on various occasions that

***“we have stopped discussing and started arguing”***. Dialogue is key to a true understanding between people.

10. I will leave you with the words of American writer William S Burroughs, who said: ***The aim of education is the knowledge, not of facts, but of values.*** So, I exhort every one of you here today — pass on knowledge with insight, impart lessons with foresight, foster innovation with patience and feed patriotism with renewed passion. In your hands lies the future of this great country that we call home. This will truly be the legacy that you and I will be proud of, many years from now.

Thank You

Jai Hind.