

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
AT THE 160TH CONVOCATION OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF MADRAS**

Chennai, May 5, 2018

1. I am happy to be delivering the 160th Convocation Address of the University of Madras. Today is an important occasion for the graduating students, as well as for your professors and family members. They have strived to support you as you have worked hard to complete your academic programme. It is also a momentous anniversary for the University, the story of which has mirrored the evolution of modern higher education in our country. My congratulations to all of you, especially to the graduating students, and to all others associated with this illustrious University.

2. From the middle of the 19th century, the University of Madras has been a cornerstone of our nation building project. It is among the institutions responsible for the strong foundations of education, intellectual advance and knowledge production in India, particularly in the south of our country. I am told that in the region it is popularly referred to as the “Mother of Universities”. It is truly a monumental institution, and I am not referring to just the imposing heritage buildings on this campus.

3. There is a remarkable list of nation builders who have been alumni of this University or of its constituent colleges. No other University in India can make the claim that six former Presidents – six of my distinguished predecessors – are old students. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, Dr V.V. Giri, Mr Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy, Mr R. Venkataraman, Dr K.R. Narayanan and Dr A P J Abdul Kalam all studied here before eventually graduating to the highest office in Rashtrapati Bhavan. The first Indian to become Governor-General of our country, the venerable C. Rajagopalachari, or “Rajaji”, as we remember him, too was an alumnus.

4. Two Nobel laureates – Sir C.V. Raman and Dr Subrahmanyam Chandrasekar – as well as two former Chief Justices of India – Justice K. Subba Rao and Justice M. Patanjali Sastri – studied here. Pioneering women leaders such as Mrs Sarojini Naidu and Mrs Durgabai Deshmukh were educated at the University of Madras. The roll call of great Indians who have spent their formative years in this University is so long that if I mention all of them, I will be speaking for a few hours. However, I would especially like to mention one stalwart – the late C. Subramaniam. He was an inspiration as a politician and as a public servant. As Agriculture Minister, he was crucial to the Green Revolution and to making us self-sufficient in food.
5. That legacy of scholarship, of learning and of achievement lives on. Even today, some of India's best known names internationally – from chess Grandmaster Viswanathan Anand to the corporate leader Indra Nooyi– are graduates of the University of Madras. The students who are graduating today are taking forward a rich heritage.
6. The expression “change with continuity” is often used and sometimes overused. But in few institutions is it as meaningful as at the University of Madras. One of the hallmarks of this University has been its ability to incorporate change even while keeping basic values intact. This attribute has helped it stay contemporary and relevant to emerging needs of students and of society. The range of courses and subjects offered here symbolises this – and spans the traditional liberal arts to 21st century disciplines. History and economics are taught here, and so are anthropology and religious studies. And today this University has room for, among others, bioinformatics, nano-science and actuarial science, which is so important for our insurance industry.
7. The University of Madras has both benefited from and contributed to a tradition of scholarship that is central to Tamil Nadu's identity. Even ordinary families in the state emphasise the value of education. This has had a direct impact on social development indices and on the economy. Tamil Nadu has a proud culture of

research and innovation – whether in the pure sciences or in medicine – and of engineering and manufacturing. It has a well-regarded IT sector and a growing digital economy. These are complemented by excellence in the humanities. It is no surprise that the Tamil language is among the most ancient in the world. Centuries before many others, it was exploring the literature and philosophy of learning.

8. The ability to pursue education as an end in itself as well as to help fill gaps in day-to-day lives of our fellow citizens is commendable. In this context the people of Tamil Nadu, and institutions such as the University of Madras, are a model for our country. Inevitably, it is to institutions such as these that we turn for direction and leadership at the beginning of the 21st century. This is an exciting chapter for India. We are looking to become a developed society and to urgently eliminating poverty as well as ensuring healthcare, education, housing and energy access for all our people. Simultaneously, our country is seeking to meet the opportunities as well as the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution – of robotics, genomics and Artificial Intelligence.
9. Universities such as this one are expected to be our navigators on this journey. Institutions in Tamil Nadu have shown commendable agility in nurturing an ecosystem that helps engineers and other qualified young people to become entrepreneurs and job creators. This is the route to the future and this is the pathway for the youth of our country.

Ladies and Gentlemen and Dear Students

10. This convocation and this anniversary are a moment of renewal for both the University of Madras and for those graduating today. For the University, the 160th anniversary is a point at which to reflect as to where you wish to be in 40 years – when you commemorate your bi-centenary. The University needs to aspire to the next level, to benchmark itself against the best in the world, and to continue to remain competitive for top students as well as top faculty.

11. The government of India has announced a programme to promote excellence in higher education by building capacities of 20 Institutions of Eminence. I am told that the University of Madras has prepared an ambitious and detailed plan in this regard, and I wish you all the best. Please also build networks of your impressive and globally dispersed alumni and involve them in actionable proposals to upgrade the University, its systems and its scholarship.

12. And to the students who are graduating today, I can only say that you are entering a world teeming with opportunities. You have been fortunate to have experienced education in a university of such standing. Not everybody has this privilege. As you leave this campus, carry your learning with humility. And in some manner – in any manner you choose – give back to society and to those who are less well-off. Let that be the true test of your education.

Thank you
Jai Hind!