

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
AT THE CONVOCATION CEREMONY OF JAWAHARLAL NEHRU
UNIVERSITY**

New Delhi, November 18, 2020

I extend my heartiest congratulations to all the students being awarded PhD by this prestigious University. I also congratulate their research guides and parents on this occasion which is so special for them.

It gives me pleasure to note that JNU has received the highest-ranking grade from National Assessment and Accreditation Council. It is consistently ranked number 2 among all the Universities under the National Institutional Ranking Framework of the Government of India. I congratulate the team of JNU for maintaining this rank during the current year 2020 also. I am told that JNU was given the Best University Award by the President of India in 2017.

I had the pleasure of conferring upon the selected members of the University's faculty, the Visitor's Award for Technology Development in 2018 and for Research in 2019. These awards were given for their work in the areas of Life Sciences, Physical Sciences and Nano-Science. This underlines the wide range of specialised learning promoted by JNU which has been already famous for excellence in the fields related to Humanities, Social Sciences and Liberal Arts. It can be said that elements of multi-disciplinary approach to higher education emphasised by the National Education Policy 2020 have been there in the philosophy of learning adopted at JNU.

I appreciate every person associated with JNU for setting high standards in various academic domains. Ranging from social sciences to science and technology, both teaching and research here have made an impact in the world of academics. That is why JNU attracts students from all parts of the country and even from abroad. About 15 percent of the students joining the University every year, representing 30 to 35 countries. JNU has also given recognition and accreditation to various

institutes of defence education and research which enhances the holistic character of the University.

In the context of holistic education, I have been told that JNU is taking steps to establish centres in new fields of studies which aim at promoting skill-development and employability of our youth. This will enable them to create knowledge-based enterprises and contribute to India's economic development. Setting up of the Atal Incubation Centre is one of such new initiatives. It is likely to help innovators in scaling up their ideas and sharing the fruits of their work with the whole nation. The Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and the entire team of JNU deserve appreciation for such initiatives.

Dear students,

As students of JNU, you are privileged on many counts. You are part of one of the most diverse and vibrant intellectual communities, with highly accomplished students and faculty. The University has produced many eminent personalities and has been guided by some of the greatest minds.

One of my distinguished predecessors, Shri K.R. Narayanan had served as Vice-Chancellor of this University.

It must be a matter of pride for students of the University that India's Finance Minister, Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman and Minister of External Affairs Dr. S. Jaishankar are former students of JNU. From among the over eighty thousand former students of JNU, many have been making their impact in India and abroad through contribution in the Civil Services, academia, politics, social work, science and technology, media and communications, fine arts and business-leadership.

In addition to benefitting from the rich intellectual legacy of the University, the students have the delight of living and studying in one of the most beautiful campuses, built on the outcrop of the Aravali range. On the campus, students and teachers live in close proximity. This closeness strengthens the bond between them. This closer bond facilitates learning. Excellent faculty of this University have been

encouraging free debate and respect for difference in opinions. Students are treated as partners in learning which is how it should be in higher education. The University is known for vibrant discussions which also take place outside the classrooms, in the cafeterias and dhabas at all hours.

Students coming from all parts of India and from all strata of society study here in an atmosphere of equal opportunity for excellence. Students aspiring for very different career paths come together in JNU. The University represents blending of inclusion, diversity and excellence.

Dear students,

All shades of Indian culture are reflected in JNU. Names of buildings, hostels, roads and facilities on the campus are drawn from the Indian heritage. This represent a cultural and geographical picture of India at its best. This Indianness is your legacy and strengthening it is your duty. Related to this duty of the educated is a statement of Mahatma Gandhi which I quote, “All education in a country has got to be demonstrably in promotion of the progress of the country in which it is given.” Unquote. I urge upon all of you to always remember the debt we owe to our society and the nation. It is your sacred duty to repay this debt by reaching out to the people who are left behind in the country’s journey for growth and development.

In addition to linking the purpose of general education with the progress of the country, Gandhiji had also made a special observation about the objectives of university education. He had written and I quote, “The aim of university education should be to turn out true servants of the people who will live and die for the country’s freedom.” Unquote.

Similarly, the great social revolutionary and architect of our Constitution, Dr. Babasahab Ambedkar always considered the country’s interest to be the foremost. He had said and I quote, “I want all people to be Indian first, Indian last and nothing else but Indians.” Unquote.

We had attained political freedom in 1947. Attainment of social and economic freedom by many segments of the people of India is a work in progress. The country is moving in that direction. The guidance of Mahatma Gandhi and Babasahab Ambedkar for serving the country and its people should be followed by students of all the Universities. It is a significant historical coincidence that JNU began functioning in the year of Mahatma Gandhi's Centenary in 1969.

The genius of India found one of its finest expressions in the personality, actions and sermons of Swami Vivekananda. Swamiji had once said and I quote, "Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested, all your life. We must have life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas. If you have accumulated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who has got by heart a whole library..."

The statue of Swami Vivekananda installed in the JNU campus which was recently unveiled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, will keep reminding the students of the universal ideals preached and practiced by Swamiji.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In dealing with today's challenges, we can draw inspiration from the exalted centres of learning in ancient India. Universities in Takshashila, Nalanda, Vikramshila and Vallabhi had set high standards of teaching and research. Scholars and students from all across the world came to those centres to attain specialised knowledge or 'Vigyan'. That ancient system, which had many elements of modernity, produced great scholars such as Charaka, Aryabhata, Chanakya, Panini, Patanjali, Gargi, Maitreyi and Thiruvalluvar. They made invaluable contributions to medical science, mathematics, astronomy, grammar and social development. People from other parts of the world translated the works of Indian scholars and used the learning for further advancement of knowledge. Today's Indian scholars should try to create such an original body of knowledge which is utilised for dealing with contemporary global

challenges. JNU is among those select institutions of higher learning which can reach globally comparable excellence.

All the students who have received their doctorate today must remember that scholars from JNU command very high regard in the global academic arena. They have been honoured with prestigious prizes and honours. Their work is cited frequently by researchers and students all over the world. You have to build upon this rich legacy.

I commend the PhD scholars for choosing to pursue specialised knowledge in their fields. In-depth knowledge acquired by you all will not only help you realise your personal aspirations; it is also an asset for the entire country and society. It will also enable you to make valuable contribution in India's emergence as a strong force in the global knowledge society.

Dear students,

Today the world is in a state of crisis because of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the prevailing scenario of epidemics and pandemics, the National Education Policy 2020 states that it is critical for Higher Education Institutions to take the lead in undertaking research in areas of infectious diseases, epidemiology, virology, diagnostics, instrumentation, vaccinology and other relevant areas. The related social issues also need to be studied, preferably with multi-disciplinary approach. In this endeavour, Universities like JNU should be at the forefront to develop specific hand holding mechanisms and promote innovation among student communities.

I once again congratulate the students on their special academic accomplishment of earning a doctorate.

I wish you all, a very successful and bright future.

Jai Hind!

