

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,  
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND  
AT THE 15<sup>TH</sup> CONVOCATION OF SYMBIOSIS INTERNATIONAL  
UNIVERSITY**

Pune, October 23, 2018

1. I am happy to be here today for the 15<sup>th</sup> convocation of Symbiosis International Deemed University. A convocation ceremony is a milestone for an educational institution as well as for the graduating students. I congratulate each one of the 5939 students who are being awarded degrees today. I would also like to congratulate innovator and education reformist Sonam Wangchuk – the pride of Ladakh and one of the inspirations for the well-known film 3 Idiots – for being conferred a Doctorate of Literature (Honoris Causa).
2. For the graduating students, this is a special moment. It is the realisation of the hard work and sacrifice put in by you as students, by your professors and teachers, and by your parents and families that have supported and stood by you. You are about to enter a world packed with opportunities, a world for which Symbiosis has prepared you. Do remember that studying at such a fine institution itself has been an opportunity and a privilege.
3. Your education gives you responsibility – responsibility to help those less-privileged and less-fortunate. How you choose to do this is entirely up to you, but do remember that your empathy for fellow citizens is as much a test of your scholarship as your mark-sheet or your degree.
4. In my capacity as President of India, I have made a conscious effort to visit universities and educational institutions across the country to meet and interact with students and future thought leaders of our country. One of my findings has been that the academic performance of girl students tends to

exceed that of boys. Today too of the nine gold medals awarded at this convocation, six have gone to graduating girls. This is commendable and a happy sign for our society. I offer my congratulations to the entire Symbiosis family.

5. Knowledge has no gender boundaries. Neither does it have geographical boundaries. It is a matter of pride for us that India has been a centre of learning for centuries. From Taxila to Nalanda, the subcontinent's age-old universities attracted students from different parts of Asia and beyond. In modern times as well our campuses have been open to and welcoming of talented young people from many countries, especially those in our neighbourhood and in Africa – a continent with which we have a special relationship, shaped in classrooms.
6. It is worth noting that 46,144 international students from 166 countries study in various colleges, universities and institutions of higher learning in India. Symbiosis plays a significant role in this process and I am happy to hear that over 1,000 international students study here. Of those who graduating today, 329 students are from 33 countries other than India. This adds to the multicultural and cosmopolitan atmosphere of your campus, and promotes goodwill among nations. I would like to congratulate the international graduates, particularly the young man from Uganda who has won the "Outstanding Foreign Student" Award. You arrived here as students. I am confident you are departing as lifelong friends and unofficial ambassadors of India.

Ladies and Gentlemen and Dear Students,

7. The location of your University in Pune is not a coincidence. The founders of Symbiosis have drawn from the traditions of learning and of the linkage between education, social change and fraternity that have been part of this city's history. As I have said on an earlier visit, the story of modern India owes much to the progressive ideas that have flowed from Pune, and for which our nation is truly appreciative.

8. It was in this city that in 1848 Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and Savitribai Phule opened the first modern school in India exclusively for girls. In their valiant efforts to equip the weaker sections of our society, Jyotiba and Savitribai Phule made education a formidable instrument. It was in Pune that Justice M.G. Ranade and others set up the Maharashtra Girls Education Society in the 19th century. In the same period, Vasudev Balwant Phadke, the great freedom-fighter, set up the Maharashtra Education Society. Bal Gangadhar Tilak and his colleagues established the Deccan Education Society. And Gopal Krishna Gokhale helped set up the Servants of India Society.
9. Such stalwarts took the lamp of learning far and wide. Many of the educational institutions that were established are still with us. Gokhaleji and the intellectual culture of Pune were a profound influence upon Mahatma Gandhi. The bond between Gandhiji and this city was strong and is worth cherishing as we commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> year of his birth.
10. The Chief Architect of our Constitution, Dr B.R. Ambedkar, too had a warm association with Pune. For him, education was an essential building block of a fair and equal society. I have no doubt that Symbiosis draws inspiration from these glorious names and chapters of our recent past. These were nation builders who fought for political independence from imperial rule and also for an Indian society free of discrimination on the basis of caste, gender or any other marker. For each of them, the spread of education was nonnegotiable.
11. The past motivates us, but the future too beckons. What is the benchmark that Symbiosis University and other universities must set for themselves? The breadth of Indian higher education is appreciable. India has a massive network of 903 universities and 39,050 colleges. But the fact is there

are still gaps in quality and in attaining world-class excellence across the spectrum.

12. In this context, the government has taken a decision to promote and support 20 institutions of higher education as “institutes of eminence” – to grant them recruitment and curricula flexibility in order to reach best-in-class global standards. After a competitive process, the first few of these institutes of eminence were announced recently. There will be future rounds as well. Please aim to build and locate at least one such “institute of eminence” at Symbiosis University. This is the responsibility of the University administrators and professors – as well as of the students graduating today. I would urge you to continue to contribute to the intellectual and related capacities of your alma mater.
13. With those words, I once again congratulate all those who have been awarded degrees today, and I wish the Symbiosis community all the best for the future.

Thank you,  
Jai Hind!